Commentary

March 1996

Is Neoconservatism Dead?

Norman Podhoretz

Is the Republican Revolution Alive?

Irwin M. Stelzer

Against Homosexual Marriage

James Q. Wilson

The Lovemaking of I.B. Singer—A Story

Norma Rosen

Comes the Millennium

George Weigel

Grantsmanship & the Killing Fields

Peter W. Rodman

The Americans

Dorothea Straus

Ms. Wonder-Child, For Example

Terry Teachout

Books in Review

André A. Aciman • David Gelernter • Chester E. Finn, Jr.
Elliott Abrams • Sol Stern

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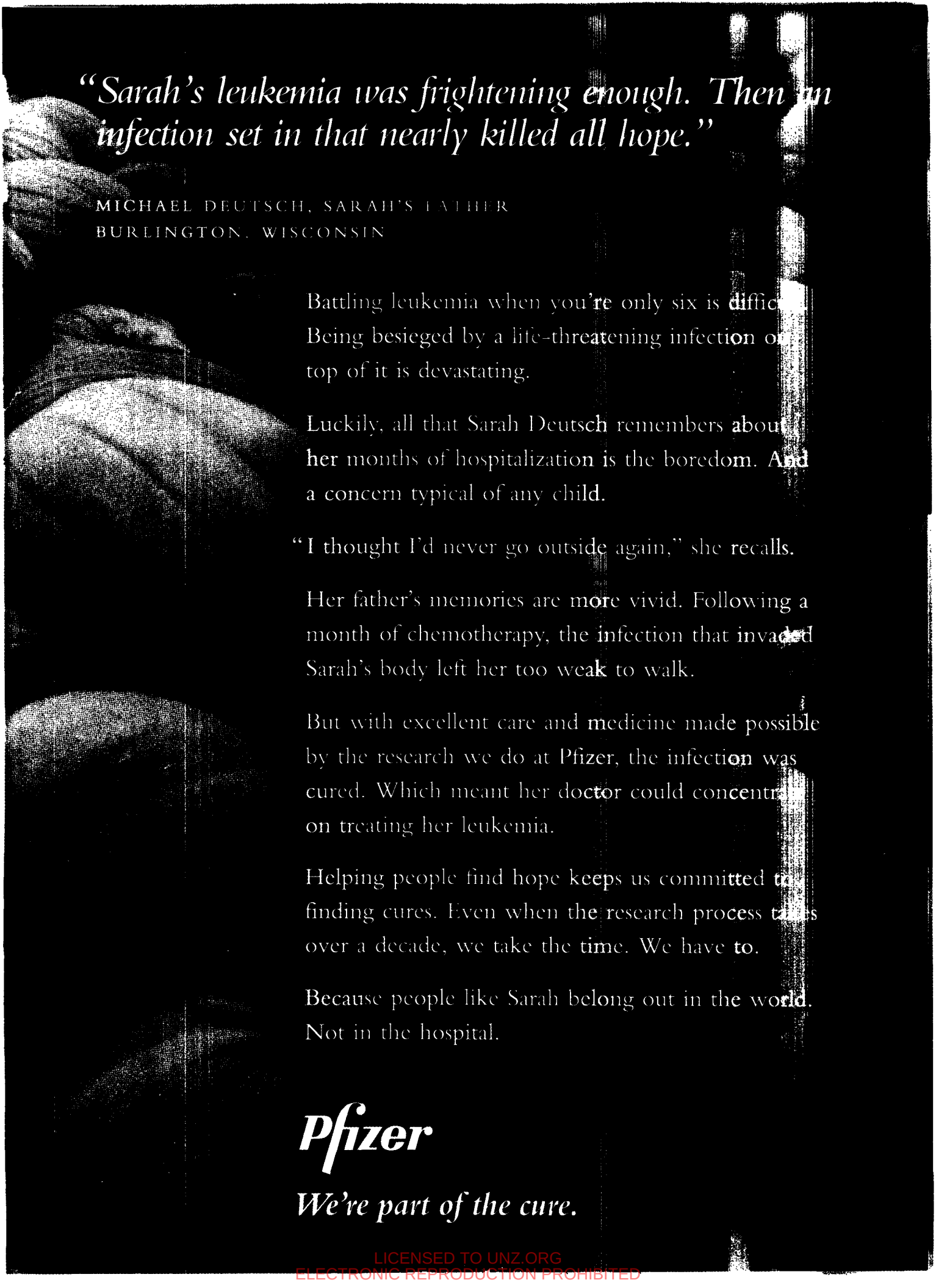

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Commentary
March 1996

Letters from Readers

Race in America

To the Editor:

Although I agree with many of Arch Puddington's arguments in "Speaking of Race" [December 1995], there are some things he either does not mention or does not stress sufficiently. . . .

First, there is the question of what happened to the vanishing idea of interracial harmony. Some black leaders clearly saw that playing on emotional grievances was a way to gain power in the black community—and they have continued to use this tactic to this day. But much of the response to such calls has to be at least partially a response to disappointed expectations. The 1960's civil-rights movement gave blacks the equality under law they had rightly demanded, but equal results did not follow. Legal equality did not mean economic or social equality. This had to be a major disappointment.

A similar situation occurred in Eastern Europe. People there have also been bitterly disappointed by the fact that political freedom and the free market increase opportunity but do not guarantee results. Many blacks, with equally short memories, reacted to their disappointment by supporting a return to . . . segregation. In the growing American climate of shucking off personal responsibility, unmet expectations have lent credence to the idea that there is a "white conspiracy" to keep blacks oppressed.

A second cause of racial problems is the conservative backlash against the civil-rights movement. Liberals went too far in setting up such well-meaning programs as affirmative action (perhaps even the concept itself was flawed), and black-power types started preaching that the civil-rights movement had failed before it was given a chance to work. But many conservatives started playing on white resentment and race consciousness even before there were specific programs to resent. . . . For example, the Southern strategy of the Republicans came into being before affirmative action and the long list of real and alleged white grievances it created was put in place.

Mr. Puddington is correct as far as he goes. However, we have to recognize the toxic effects of unrealistic expectations among blacks, and cynical (at best) behavior among conservative white leaders. These contributed at least as much as black power and misguided liberalism to laying the groundwork for the vicious racial resentment/backlash cycle we find ourselves in today.

Bruce Brager
Arlington, Virginia

To the Editor:

. . . Arch Puddington seems to suggest that prior to the introduction of affirmative action, Americans as a whole did not think in terms of race and that affirmative action prevents the development of a truly color-blind society. Such statements are either uninformed or intentional misrepresentations of the reality of American history.

The average American of working age was born before the day when segregation in accommodations and housing was made illegal. . . . African-American voting in the South has become common only in the last 30 years. Significant numbers of African-Americans have held office in the South for roughly 25 years. A Southern black would have to be younger than thirty not to have any significant memory of segregation. Needless to say, African-Ameri-

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cans who are older than fifty have spent major portions of their formative and productive years in a society that permitted legal discrimination.

Bearing this in mind, it seems odd to me that many conservatives like Mr. Puddington assume that the passage of a few federal and state laws would effectively make America color-blind. . . .

Mr. Puddington's apparent acceptance of what he calls the "daily suspicion" of young black men by whites seems to belie his earlier declaration of American color-blindness. In a truly color-blind society, black men encountered on the street by the general public would be judged as individuals: those who acted threateningly or behaved badly would be judged accordingly; those who behaved properly and appeared to be decent would not be considered threats. To put things another way, using Mr. Puddington's logic, as a black man in the South I should be hostile to every white man I meet, given the region's history, and whenever I encounter law-enforcement officers anywhere in America, I should be prepared for violence.

This willingness by many Americans to accept things like the "daily suspicion" of black men is largely responsible for the continued emphasis on racism by African-American leadership. Contrary to the ideas of Dinesh D'Souza in his new book, *The End of Racism*, African-Americans, like Jews and other minorities, realize it takes far more than a public disavowal of racism or a particular prejudice for it to be removed as a damaging force in society. . . .

ANTHONY Q. CHEESEBORO
Murray State University
Murray, Kentucky

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . In "Speaking of Race," Arch Puddington says that we must

> tear down our absurd, counterproductive, and incendiary system of group classifications and preferences, and reassert the doctrine of race neutrality. This will not happen without a struggle. Some critics of racial preferences have even been prompted to suggest a prudent stepping-back from the effort.

Mr. Puddington seems to realize that such "prudence" would be much like General Meade's not pursuing Robert E. Lee after Gettysburg. "No worse advice can be imagined," he says. Yet strangely, he himself "steps back." . . .

As William B. Allen, the former chairman of the Civil Rights Commission, and others have suggested, the root cause of this "absurd system" can be traced back to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which midwifed the invidious civil-rights mentality that is an example of what Hamilton warned against over 200 years ago. . . . Yet Dinesh D'Souza's recommendation, in *The End of Racism*, that we jettison this failed exercise in authoritarian reform liberalism is adjudged by Mr. Puddington to be one of the book's weakest features. . . .

As long as we adhere to the outmoded premise that blacks need special protections aside from the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the common law, we will continue denying them the self-respect they deserve as fellow citizens. It is time for the courts and legislatures to get out of the "Dear Abby" business and return such decisions to the people and our core Indo-European, Anglo-Saxon culture so that we can regain our morality and shared values. Let all of us "minorities" recover our mutual respect and our self-respect in the purifying adventure of the melting pot. Repeal the Civil Rights Act. Contrary to Mr. Puddington *et al.*, there is no other way to engage the struggle.

W. EDWARD CHYNOWETH
Sanger, California

ARCH PUDDINGTON writes:

Bruce Brager locates the source of our current racial troubles in the unrealistic expectations of equality raised by the civil-rights movement. This is, unfortunately, only part of the story. A more fundamental problem is the implied promise that equality of condition could be attained in the post-civil-rights period through state action. On one level, urban Marshall plans were proposed to rebuild the inner city and put all its inhabitants to work. On another level, social scientists laid out ambitious schemes to integrate the workforce through hiring quotas and to equalize educational opportunity through busing. On still another level, the quality of life of the poor was to be enhanced through a massive expansion of the welfare system.

The parallel which Mr. Brager draws between the post-liberation experiences of black America and Eastern Europe is in this regard highly instructive. In the case of post-Communist Eastern Europe, the West had the wisdom to speak hard truths: there would be no significant infusion of aid; if Poland, Russia, and the other former Communist countries expected to participate in the international economy, they would be required to adhere to the rules, even though this would mean a considerable amount of short-term economic pain. The countries which accepted these terms have made important strides toward prosperity; those which have resisted are poorer and politically less stable.

Black Americans, by contrast, were repeatedly assured that they could skirt the normal workings of the market in their pursuit of equality. They were told that without an activist government their opportunities would be severely limited. And they were told that racism was still as pervasive in American society as it had been under segregation. These are not messages which stimulate competitiveness, entrepreneurship, high aspirations, and the work ethic. They ultimately lead, instead, to defeatism and embitterment. And for this the civil-rights leadership and liberalism generally must take the blame.

I do not share Mr. Brager's concern over Republican hypocrisy on racial matters. Dishonesty on racial matters is pervasive in American society. For every conservative

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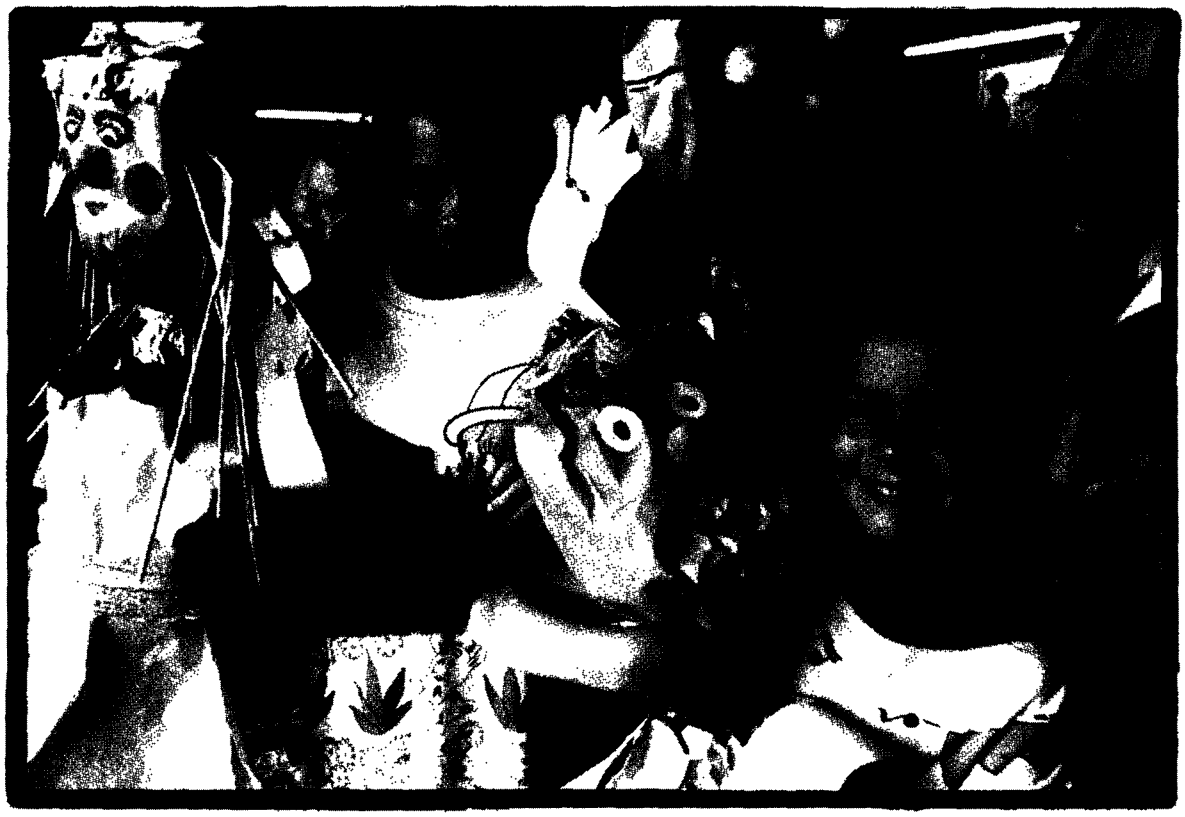

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who has exploited busing, crime, or quotas, there is a liberal who has attempted to deflect debate on busing, crime, or quotas by labeling his opponents as racist. America would clearly benefit from a moderation of the tone of racial debate, but only if the civil-rights movement abandons its practice of impugning the motives of those who question the wisdom of affirmative action and other government policies.

I want to assure Anthony Q. Cheeseboro that I do not believe that "the passage of a few federal and state laws would effectively make America color-blind." My problem is with laws that exacerbate color-consciousness and with a civil-rights establishment which is increasingly open in its support of a permanently race-conscious legal order. The elimination of these laws will not automatically lead to a society in which race does not matter. It will, however, contribute to an improved racial environment by removing the quota stigma from the many thousands of black students and workers who are competing successfully in America today.

Furthermore, the proliferation of race-conscious practices reinforces the counterproductive myth that racism is the principal impediment to black progress. Mr. Cheeseboro himself invests considerable credence in the racism argument, yet he would clearly be counted a moderate in today's debate. Thus, it cannot be stressed enough that black economic progress will be retarded until it is recognized that factors other than white prejudice are the major obstacles to prosperity.

On the other hand, unlike W. Edward Chynoweth, I find the proposal to repeal all or part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act neither feasible nor appealing. Proponents justify this proposal by noting that under current law, black employers are prohibited from discriminating in favor of black workers. We have not, unfortunately, even approached the time when blacks could rise in the economy through being hired *en masse* by black-owned businesses. Until we have a proliferation of black capitalists, politically unachievable proposals like the repeal of the Civil Rights Act only detract from core debates over race-consciousness and the black social condition.

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Black Anti-Semitism

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Facing Up to Black Anti-Semitism" [December 1995] Joshua Muravchik asks what accounts for the phenomenon cited in his title and analyzes some explanations that have been given for it—including one of my own (a psychological theory, derived from Vladimir Jankélévitch) that I present in the introduction to my anthology, *Blacks and Jews*.

According to Mr. Muravchik, "In an argument reminiscent of the tortured efforts by cold-war doves to balance every Soviet misdeed with a parallel misdeed by the United States," my explanation equates Khalid Mohammed's sympathies for Hitler with Jewish neoconservatism. On the other hand, he also says that my argument defines those "parallel" misdeeds as, in my own words (which he correctly quotes), "not exactly parallel." So what am I said to have argued—that sympathy for Nazism and neoconservatism is parallel (his word)? Or not parallel (my words)?

The correct answer is: not parallel. I will admit that in my exasperation at neoconservatism I have

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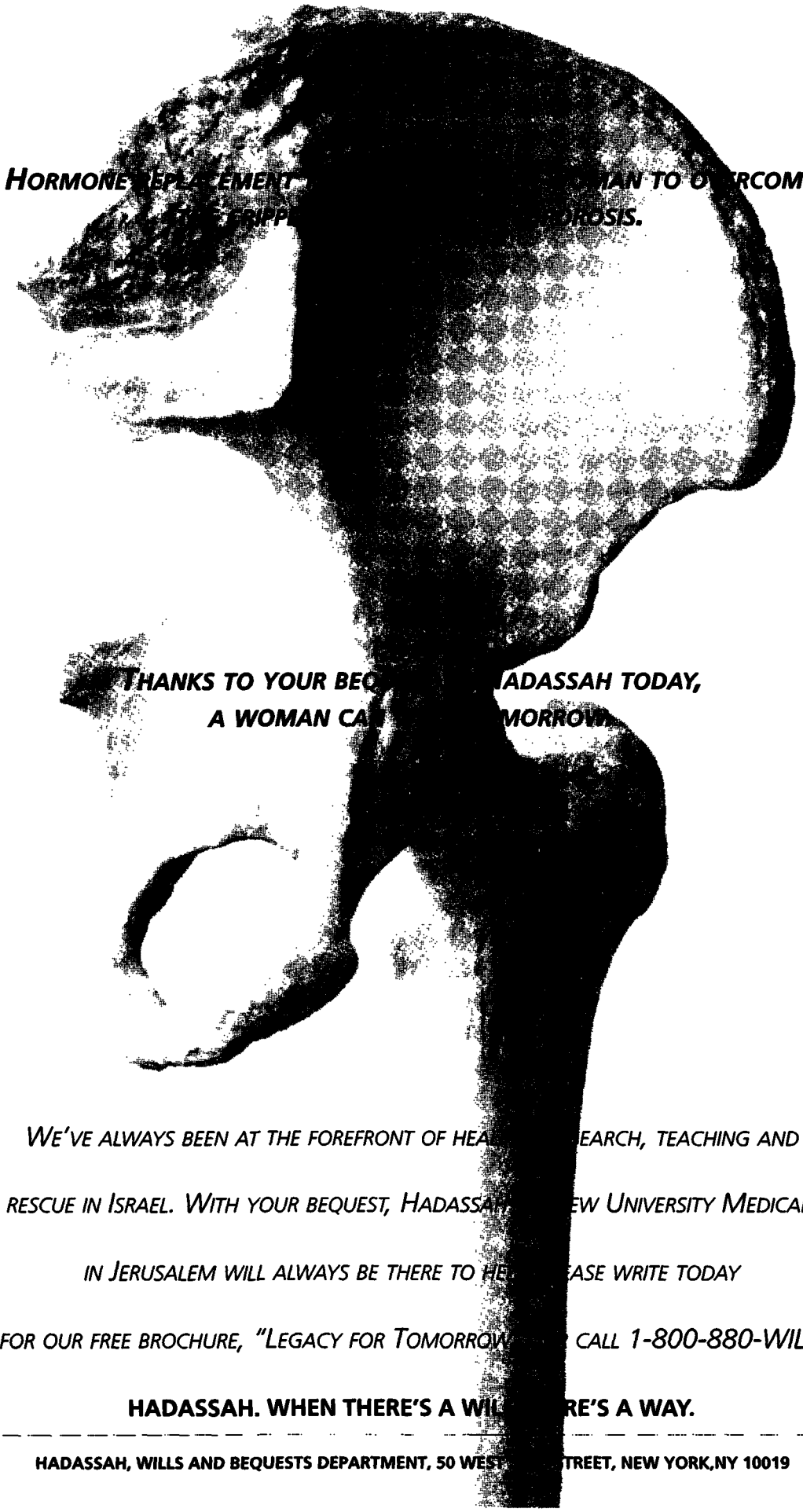

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been known in the past to compare it to every conceivable plague. The original version of my essay appeared in the *New Yorker* and left some readers in doubt concerning how severely I was condemning the neoconservatives, and to clear up the doubt I added a sentence in the version that appears in *Blacks and Jews* explicitly stating: "The growth of Jewish neoconservatism in the 70's and 80's was not itself an example of rightist extremism or racist demagogy." It was very unsporting of Mr. Muravchik not to make note of that sentence, which was intended precisely to ward off critics like him.

The actual parallel I wish to draw is between black third-worldism and Jewish neoconservatism—both of those doctrines being retreats from the old-fashioned social-democratic liberalism that once upon a time formed the basis for the black-Jewish alliance in support of civil-rights programs and agitations. But will this clarification of mine suffice to convert Mr. Muravchik to my larger theory about black-Jewish relations? It will not. For the central difference between his view and mine (given that everyone deplores anti-Semitism, and Mr. Muravchik concedes a psychological dimension to black-Jewish tensions) has to do with defining the origin and scale of any Jewish contributions to the currently lamentable state of black-Jewish relations.

Mr. Muravchik acknowledges that in the past some Jews did add their little bit to the worsening of relations. He puts it delicately, in commendably vivid prose, with a timid question mark at the end to signify a wish not to cause any heart attacks:

> Did not many Jewish participants in the civil-rights movement love the blacks as a first child does the second, basking in their role of benefactor and protector, and unwittingly inviting the resentment that is ever directed at the self-conscious doer of good deeds?

But if Mr. Muravchik is willing to concede that even the noble Jewish participants in the civil-rights movement behaved in such a way as unwittingly to provoke resentment (which is to say, the resentment was partly their fault), why is he so reluctant to acknowledge the obvious: that Jewish neoconservatives have likewise provoked a resentment, perhaps even a far larger one, and have done more than their share to sour the political atmosphere?

The embrace by some conservative Jews of Reaganism and of new allies on the white Christian Right; the hostility toward social programs for the poor; the belief that American racism against blacks has faded to such a degree that strenuous countermeasures are no longer required; the smug contempt for anyone who fails to celebrate the successes of the new black middle class, combined with (oddly) a smug contempt for anyone who approves the affirmative-action programs that have created the new black middle class; the new willingness to traffic in ghastly, old theories of genetic inferiority; the loss of sympathy for the trade unions that have benefited blacks (and Jews!) so magnificently—these and several other attitudes and positions that fall into the universe known as neoconservatism have had a miserable effect on many aspects of American life, and black-Jewish

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relations are no exception. Resentments have followed; and where there are resentments, there go demagogues. The rest is not even history: it is today's news.

Naturally, it would be difficult for the neoconservatives themselves to see their own responsibility in the downward spiral of black-Jewish relations. What I describe as neoconservatism's miserable effects other people may regard as marvelous achievements. Yet as Mr. Muravchik's wise observation about some of the Jewish participants in the civil-rights movement of long ago ought to remind us, many a pure-hearted citizen who imagines himself doing good may, in fact, be doing bad, without ever noticing—until 30 years have gone by and there's hell to pay.

PAUL BERMAN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Having grown up in what used to be called "transitional neighborhoods," I was exposed to black anti-Semitism early on, and accepted it as one of the realities of life. If I thought about its causes at all, I assumed that it derived from the wider culture and provided blacks with a safe target for the expression of their anger and frustration at whites. But I always considered the fact of its existence rather than its source to be the key issue—that, and the reaction of Jews to the reality of my experience. They told me that black anti-Semitism (or any kind of negative behavior on the part of blacks) could not be; it was merely an understandable resentment against Jewish businessmen and landlords. . . .

Nor has much seemed to change since those days. For example, fellow Jews have assured me that there were understandable reasons for blacks to riot against Jews in Crown Heights and that the hasidic community was wrong to make such a public issue of it. . . .

The discrepancy between the title of Mr. Muravchik's article and its content illustrates the strange difficulty many Jews appear to have in dealing with black anti-Semitism. Instead of focusing on the reality of black anti-Semitism and the options available to the Jewish community for coping with it, Mr. Muravchik, after first feeling it necessary to establish his civil-rights credentials, addresses himself primarily to criticizing the putative explanations and rationalizations for it. He concludes that it is "unconscionable" that so much hostility against Jews is to be found in the black community after all that Jews have done for black civil rights.

Well, Machiavelli did point out that one "should not put one's trust in the gratitude of princes" and he could just as validly have stated that one "should not put one's trust in gratitude." Further, I would like to believe that the support given by Jews and others to the issue of black civil rights was not a tactical move to gain grateful allies but the acting out of a moral imperative.

The key issue, however, is the apparent inability of Jews simply to view blacks and black anti-Semitism as they are, and to act accordingly. . . .

STANLEY BUDNER
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Joshua Muravchik has brought forward the first new thought I have heard about black anti-Semitism and the Nation of Islam. That is, that Jews care when they are insulted by the likes of Louis Far-

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rakhan and Khalid Mohammed.

I am a Catholic and I do not feel insulted when Khalid Mohammed mocks the Pope as an old man in a skirt, etc. My reaction is merely, well, what would you expect from a person like that? Who cares what Cornel West thinks or what the rest of the explainers and fellow-travelers think?

Anti-Semitic blacks *do not matter*. If they try to act on their hatreds, the response ought to be a simple matter of law enforcement.

Nazi anti-Semitism was dangerous because by 1931 the Nazis had a well-organized mass party, a few private armies composed of war veterans, and wide appeal at all levels of German society, including many in the officer class of the real army and also including such intellectuals as the philosopher Martin Heidegger. What do the black anti-Semites have? . . .

JEFFREY HART
Lyme, New Hampshire

TO THE EDITOR:

I found Joshua Muravchik's explanations of the deepening rift between American blacks and Jews convincing except for one telling omission: the lack of personal contact between these two minorities. Perhaps it was a simpler time, but in the 1950's when I grew up there seemed to be more opportunities for blacks and Jews to mingle socially than there are now, and as a consequence I was unaware of any groundswell of anti-Semitism among the blacks I knew.

Not that it was a general rule for blacks and whites—Jews and Gentiles alike—to relax socially together in the Chicago of my childhood. To hang out socially with those of other races was still a somewhat daring thing to do, but this, I felt, was due more to a lack of proximity than anything else. . . .

At the time I was a sophomore in a racially mixed high school on the South Side; the racial composition of the school was about 70 percent white and 30 percent black. . . . When the time for class elections came around, Don Leftwich, one of my classmates, decided to run for president. He surprised me by asking me to be his campaign manager . . . and invited me to his house to discuss the upcoming campaign. I was greeted at the door by Don's mother, a gracious, charming woman who immediately put me at ease . . . and treated me as just another of Don's friends.

As Don and I discussed our plans for the election I remember being so distracted by my surroundings that my attention kept veering away from the discussion at hand. Though I lived in a lower-middle-class home that was clean and well-furnished, to my young eyes my friend's home exhibited a taste and elegance which made my own seem drab by comparison. . . .

After that first invitation to Don's home, I was invited back many times, and was invited to other Jewish homes as well. My best friend at the time, Marvin Rubin, was the son of Russian Jews who had emigrated to America in the 1930's. His father was a tailor, not a rich man by any means, so it was not Marvin's physical surroundings that impressed me so much as the intelligence manifested within.

And that is the key reason I have always felt more comfortable with Jews than with any other ethnic group in America, including my own: a quick intelligence and burning intellectual curiosity. Ever since high school, I have found that the most intelligent, liberal, and interesting people I have met have been Jews. They were leaders in college, the principled champions of civil rights in politics, the most cultured and least narrow-minded of businessmen. Also, they had a long, colorful ethnic tradition to which each member adhered whether he thought of himself as religious or not—a rich cultural heritage which I lacked and was envious of.

For most blacks of my childhood, and I suspect even now, a Jew was the first white man they came to know. He was the only one who would come into a black neighborhood, where he owned apartment buildings or groceries or furniture stores or automobile dealerships. We blacks were exploited, yes, but we exploited "our" Jews as well, for they were the only white men who would extend us credit in times of need, the only white faces we could trust.

There was a deep bond between us for, like us, the Jew was trapped in the web of history. For him, too, there were certain occupations in which he was not welcome. In a sense, the Jew was forced to deal with the black population out of necessity; if he had not done so, both groups might have starved.

No, we did not hate the Jews; we admired them for their enterprise and their single-minded determination to get ahead. . . . Time and again they have demonstrated what can be done given the drive and the desire to move up. How often have I heard other blacks extol the Jews because "they stick together" and help one another.

Reverend Jesse "Hymietown" Jackson and the Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan notwithstanding, I am convinced that most blacks still respect Jews and wish them well, for as congenital outcasts we are more alike than we are different. We each have two languages, two sets of traditions, one for mainstream America and one for our immediate subgroup. Each of us is keenly aware of the ambiguity of our existence in America; to forget it could prove disastrous in the extreme.

I believe that most blacks understand that the road to equality in America is the same road that must be traveled by both blacks and Jews and that if either group is oppressed the other can never feel truly secure.

By the way, my friend Don Leftwich won the election for class president.

ROBERT PATTON
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The root cause of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, F.A. Hayek explained in *The Road to Serfdom*, was anti-capitalism. In that book, published in

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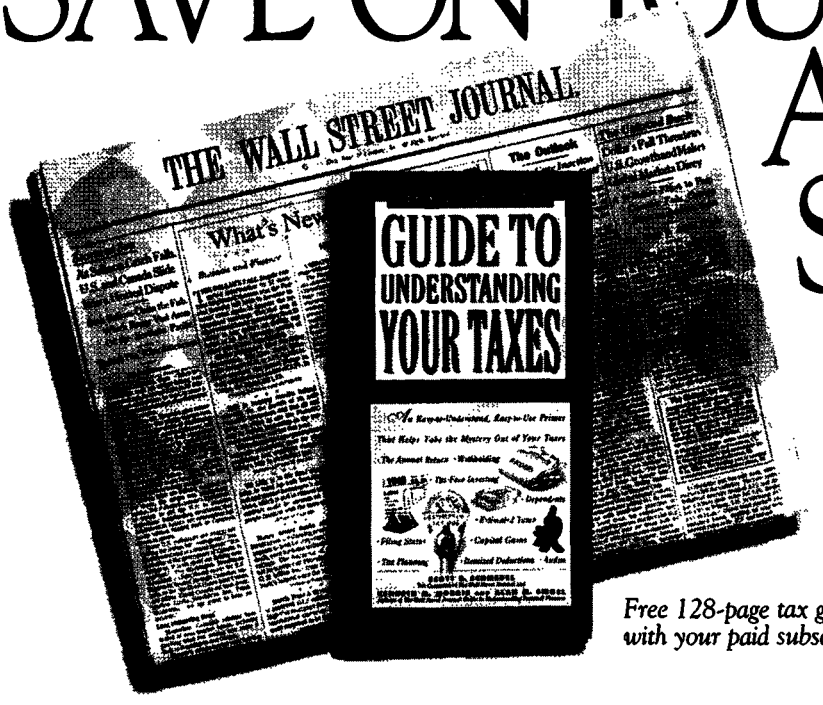

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1944 and now regarded as a classic, Hayek said:

> The fact that German anti-Semitism and anti-capitalism sprang from the same root is of great importance for the understanding of what has happened there, but this is rarely grasped by foreign observers.

I suggest that black anti-Semitism stems from the same source.

James Baldwin virtually let the cat out of the bag in treating the black-Jewish rift as a black response to Jewish landlords and shopkeepers in the inner cities. Louis Farrakhan and other current black spokesmen . . . have carried the point to its rhetorical outer limits in referring to Jewish entrepreneurs as well as their Korean and Vietnamese counterparts as "bloodsuckers." All those black academics and spokesmen, such as Leonard Jeffries of CUNY, Derrick Bell formerly of Harvard, and in particular Cornel West still of Harvard, are men of the Left, if not explicitly socialists.

One other point. In a widely quoted remark attributed to Milton Himmelfarb, American Jews are said to live like affluent Episcopalians but to vote like Puerto Ricans. Some 70 to 75 percent of Jewish voters—possibly including Jewish entrepreneurs themselves—support the Democratic party, a percentage that is exceeded only by the 90 to 95 percent of the black vote which goes to the Democrats. Is it a paradox that these two groups, which are among the largest voting blocs in the Democratic party, despite their intense animosity and bitterness toward each other are nevertheless bound together politically?

The cement which bonds these two adversaries ideologically, I suggest, is the spirit of anti-capitalism within the Democratic party. . . . Milton Friedman—like Hayek, a Nobel laureate—pointed out years ago in a speech to the Mont Pelerin Society on Jews and capitalism (published in the June 1984 issue of *Encounter*) that no group in history has benefited more than the Jews from capitalism and yet none, through its leftist intellectuals, has done more to destroy or undermine it.

Is it possible that a new generation of Jewish academics, intellectuals, and pundits, many of them former socialists themselves, coming together in what is often called the neoconservative movement, may yet, under the COMMENTARY umbrella, lead us out of this morass?

MAURICE ROSENFIELD
Chicago, Illinois

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK writes:

Paul Berman finds it unsporting of me not to have been warded off by a sentence that he honorably admits was inserted in his book precisely to ward off criticisms such as mine. I cannot confidently discern the degree of irony he intends here, but I take it that he is acknowledging—and if not, he ought to be—that a sentence in which he tried to cover himself did not change his underlying message, which was cheap and abusive, namely, that Jewish neoconservatism is, if "not exactly parallel," then roughly parallel to black Hitlerism.

I will, however, suppress the impulse simply to dismiss Mr. Berman out of hand and instead tackle his argument. He enumerates many beliefs of Jewish neoconservatives that he thinks have made blacks angry at Jews. But Jews remain overwhelmingly faithful to liberal tenets, more so than any other ethnic group except blacks. If black anger were indeed a calibrated response to stands on issues, then the black community would be philo-Semitic.

Let us suppose, however, for argument's sake, that we neoconservatives succeeded in winning a majority of Jews to positions that Mr. Berman finds deplorable. Would that then justify anti-Semitism—by blacks or anyone else? Do the Jewish people have to adhere to liberalism, or any given ideology, in order not to deserve hatred? Neoconservatism is not the only political movement in which Jews have been overrepresented. Jews constituted a "disproportionate" number of the Bolshevik movements of Europe, movements that did real, deadly harm to people infinitely in excess of any harm neoconservative policies might cause. Does Mr. Berman think this justifies the anti-Semitic movements that avenged themselves on the Jews in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's?

Jeffrey Hart echoes my point that Jews are more sensitive than other whites to expressions of black hatred and then turns it around and asks why, in a situation of legal security, they should be. The ready answer is the Holocaust and the whole history of grievous persecutions that Jews have suffered. But perhaps the more profound answer is that Jews are deeply hurt and bewildered by the hatred shown so often and by so many. Sometimes this impels them to escapism, as in, I am sorry to say, Maurice Rosenfield's theory that anti-Semitism is only a form of anti-capitalism. The Nazis, let us recall, did not endeavor to exterminate capitalists.

Finally, let me thank Robert Patton. I was touched by his reminiscence, and I am willing to believe that lack of social contact could be a cause of black/Jewish antagonism, but I am not aware of any data that show whether such contact has decreased or increased in recent years.

New York City & Health Care

TO THE EDITOR:

As Irwin M. Stelzer ["Can Giuliani Save New York?," December 1995] notes, in the area of crime Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has done well. Although the crime rate has dropped throughout the country, a reduction in criminal activity in New York City is no mean accomplishment. For this Giuliani should be congratulated. . . . But the city of New York faces other problems, not the least of which is the provision and cost of health care, and here the mayor has not done so well. . . .

Not long ago, the may-

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or set up an advisory panel which called for the city to get out of the health-care business and recommended that it dismantle its extensive municipal-hospital system either by closing hospitals or privatizing them. . . .

New York City is a perfect example of the fact that problems which end up in the health-care system and are paid for with health-care dollars originate in such social pathologies as the breakdown of the family, chronic unemployment, and violence. . . . AIDS, drug-abuse-related illnesses, . . . out-of-wedlock teenage pregnancies resulting in premature sick babies, and gunshot wounds and other crime-related injuries require intensive and *expensive* health care. But there is no evidence that the private sector is prepared to assume the high costs associated with these conditions. Nor does it seem likely that the elderly and the poor would be well-served, either. In fact, if the recommendations of the mayor's commission were to be carried out, the health of all New Yorkers would be adversely affected.

Another reason why New York should not close its hospitals is self-interest. They are New York's first line of defense against imported contagious diseases. Lassa, Marburg, and Ebola viruses, and other emerging agents that may cause hemorrhagic fevers are just an airplane trip away. . . . By dismantling the public-hospital system the city might find itself vulnerable, as the *New York Times*'s Nicholas Wade puts it, "to an unrelenting stream of new or newly awakened disease organisms" which have emerged in recent years. Again, no evidence exists that the private sector will take over either the patient care or the research that the city now carries out.

Moreover, the national debate over health-care reform is by no means over. But one point remains clear: if enacted, universal health insurance will mean more not less demand for public-hospital beds. Unless we intend to ration health care, the over 40-million Americans who are now uninsured or underinsured will more than fill now-unused hospital beds. In this connection, the AIDS epidemic is a grim reminder of the need for reserve-bed capacity: 20 percent of the city's hospital beds are now filled with AIDS patients, and the number is increasing. Thus, it is premature at the least to close our public hospitals *before* any health-care reform takes place. . . .

Finally, apart from functioning as a health-care resource, hospitals serve the community, especially the inner cities, as a social resource, providing jobs and education while caring for the homeless, poor, and elderly. If New York's public hospitals were closed, thousands of workers would be laid off . . . and would then in all likelihood have to go on welfare. . . .

LEROY L. SCHWARTZ, M.D.
Health Policy International
Princeton, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

I was surprised to read in Irwin M. Stelzer's article that, according to Mayor Giuliani, "There is absolutely no correlation between unemployment and crime. Go look at the Depression. It was one of the safest periods in the history of this country."

But there *was* a correlation: the Depression was not one of the safest periods in U.S. history.

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homicides hit what was then an all-time peak: over 9 per 100,000. From 1953 to 1963 homicides declined to a low of under 5 per 100,000 before going on to a new high of 10.7 in 1980, a rise that is usually attributed to drug wars. (For the reliability of homicide statistics as indicators of violence generally, . . . see *Rethinking Social Policy* by Christopher Jencks.)

Unemployment, too, was at an all-time high in the Depression: from 1931 to 1935 over 20 percent of the population was unemployed, a figure unequaled before or since in the U.S. . . .

WILLIAM H. MILLS
Olympia, Washington

Lincoln

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of David Donald's *Lincoln* [Books in Review, January], Walter Berns writes:

> Lincoln and Douglas were contesting more than a Senate seat; they were engaged in a contest for public opinion, or, in Lincoln's words, for the public mind on slavery. Although Douglas won the Senate seat in 1858, Lincoln was destined to win that wider contest. Told by friends that if he posed a certain question in the debate, he would lose the Senate race he replied, "Gentlemen, I am killing larger game; if Douglas answers, he can never be President, and the battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this." He was right, and the rest is history.

The "rest" may be history, but the story Mr. Berns relates is apocryphal. The second of Lincoln's "interrogatories" at Freeport—to which Mr. Berns alludes—was whether the people of a United States territory could exclude slavery prior to the formation of a state constitution. Neither Lincoln nor anyone else doubted that Douglas would say that they might exclude slavery by passing "unfriendly legislation." He had said so innumerable times before. Donald says that this was the key question, and Mr. Berns appears to accept this. In fact the third question was of far greater consequence. In it Lincoln asked whether Douglas would acquiesce in another *Dred Scott* decision, in which the Supreme Court would decide that neither a state nor a territory could lawfully exclude slavery from its limits.

That there had been a plot to extend slavery to the free states, and that Douglas had been part of that plot, was the heart of the argument in Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, which had launched his campaign. That Douglas had fallen out with his coconspirators did not, Lincoln insisted, change this fact. It was this third question that Douglas was really unable to answer. He merely blustered and said that no Justice would so far forget himself as to decide something so manifestly unconstitutional. But Lincoln pinioned him by proving with Euclidean precision that such a decision would be no more unconstitutional than the *Dred Scott* decision, which Douglas accepted merely because the Supreme Court had decided it. Here was Lincoln's dialectical genius in its full flower.

Mr. Berns notes that Douglas won the Senate seat. It must be remembered, however, that Senators were elected by the state legislatures, not by popular vote. Douglas won, with the assistance of holdover Democrats in the state senate. In statewide popular votes, Lincoln and the Republicans outpolled the Douglas Democrats. If it had been a straight contest with the voters, Lincoln would have won.

Neither Mr. Berns nor David Donald recognizes the most important reason Lincoln was chosen over Seward in the Republican convention in Chicago in 1860. In the presidential election of 1856 the Republicans had carried New York by a large margin, but they had lost narrowly in Illinois and Indiana. They did not need Seward to carry New York in 1860. But Lincoln in 1858 had proved his ability to carry Illinois against Douglas. There was then never any reason for him to have sacrificed his chances in 1858 for the sake of 1860. The apocryphal story related by Mr. Berns makes no political sense at all.

Mr. Berns also writes that:

> Lincoln at one point during the war proposed that the Southern states be compensated by the national government in return for a willingness, over a period of years, to abolish slavery within their boundaries. Although Congress rejected the plan, there was much to be said in its favor.

One must, however, know at what point in the war Lincoln made this proposal. It was in his annual message to Congress in December 1862. The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation had been issued on September 30, and the Final Proclamation was to come on January 1, 1863. Lincoln never expected the "Southern states" to abolish slavery. With the possible exception of Antietam, the Confederacy had at this point hardly lost a battle, and was not about to surrender. But the Emancipation Proclamation would exempt from its operation any states, or parts of states, not in rebellion, and loyal to the Union.

Lincoln did not think he had any constitutional authority to emancipate the slaves of loyal slaveholders. But he believed that if his emancipation policy succeeded, it would doom slavery in the loyal slave states as well. If the war ground to a victorious conclusion there would no longer be any possibility of the United States returning runaway slaves. Lincoln did not think it right that those who sold slaves should keep the money, and those who bought them should take all the loss. Lincoln's reverence for the rights of property was profound. Except for those in rebellion, emancipation should not be expropriation. In the end, that was what happened, but it was in spite of Lincoln, not because of him.

HARRY V. JAFFA
Claremont Institute
Claremont, California

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WALTER BERNS writes:

Silence, Harry V. Jaffa once wrote, quoting Shakespeare, "is the perfectest herald of joy," but he is not much given to practicing it, as I and many others who have been the targets of his numerous letters in this and other journals over the years have come to know.

In this latest of his effusions, after saying that my "story" of the second of Lincoln's Freeport questions is apocryphal (which it might very well be), Mr. Jaffa goes on to say that "the third question was of far greater consequence." I do not doubt that, but in his book on the Lincoln-Douglas debates (*Crisis of the House Divided*), Mr. Jaffa wrote that "Lincoln's second question to Douglas at Freeport is rightly famous, for it was the immediate cause of the most significant political effects." That, in a nutshell, is what I said, and since he taxes me for saying it, I must conclude that either he thinks I should be censured for not citing him as authority for it or that he has changed his mind.

The rest of his letter has to do with my reference to Lincoln's compensated-emancipation proposal. Unable to find fault with anything I wrote, he is reduced to saying that it is important to know, as if I did not know, "at what point in the war Lincoln made this proposal." In the course of making this point, he says that "Lincoln never expected the 'Southern states' to abolish slavery," which leaves us with the question as to why he bothered to propose that they do so. By way of forestalling another letter from Mr. Jaffa, I hasten to add that I already know the answer.

The Song of Songs

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin is concerned in his review with evaluating Ariel and Chana Bloch's new translation of the Song of Songs [Books in Review, November 1995] in terms of its literary quality, its scholarship, and its interpretation of the biblical poem. But there is an ancillary consideration which emerges from Mr. Halkin's critique: how did such an erotic work . . . ever become one of the sacred texts, sacred enough to be recited aloud by my father on Friday nights?

Not until I was in early adolescence and had read the Yiddish translation of the Song of Songs (and later, at the public library, the King James version) did I begin to look more intently at its language and imagery. My curiosity was certainly not due to any scholarly interest; it could only have come from faint stirrings of fantasy and imagination about sex. The Torah has all kinds of stories dealing with sex—Noah and Lot and their daughters; Dinah and the prince of Shechem; Joseph and Potiphar's wife; David and his lust for another man's wife; Solomon himself and his thousand wives—but none of these ever really excited my imagination the way the Song of Songs did.

So one Friday evening I asked my father a question in a roundabout fashion . . . : what was the Song of Songs about? My father understood the import of my question. He looked at me for a moment and then realized that it was time to tell me the truth: when King Solomon presented the Song of Songs to the heavenly hosts it was rejected out of hand. But Solomon explained that it was an allegory and that it was really about the love of Torah. (After all, the parchment on which Holy Scroll rests is wound in two columns, like twin doves.) It never occurred to me to ask for the source of this explanation; after all, this was my father.

The Blochs may not think there is any warrant for reading the Song of Songs as a religious allegory. But if it is about the "erotic excitement" of a pair of lovers, what has sanctified it to this day? And what about my father and countless Jews like him over the centuries who have revered the Song of Songs as holy writ—are they in error? . . .

ARNOLD BEICHMAN
Hoover Institution
Stanford, California

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Arnold Beichman asks whether "countless" Jews like his father could have been wrong in reading the Song of Songs allegorically, but he also ascribes to his father a revealing story about the angels in heaven not reading the poem as an allegory at all. And even in antiquity the angels had company: as far back as the 1st or 2nd century C.E. we find Rabbi Akiva, who so revered the Song of Songs that he proclaimed it the holiest book in the Bible, attacking his fellow Jews for singing its lyrics bawdily in the wine houses.

How does an erotic love poem become a sacred text? No one knows the process by which this happened with the Song of Songs, but I would guess the reason it did happen was simply the poem's greatness. It was too powerful and hauntingly mysterious a work not to strike its listeners as human expression at its most sublime—and this, to the rabbis, meant human expression at its most divine. The rest was commentary.

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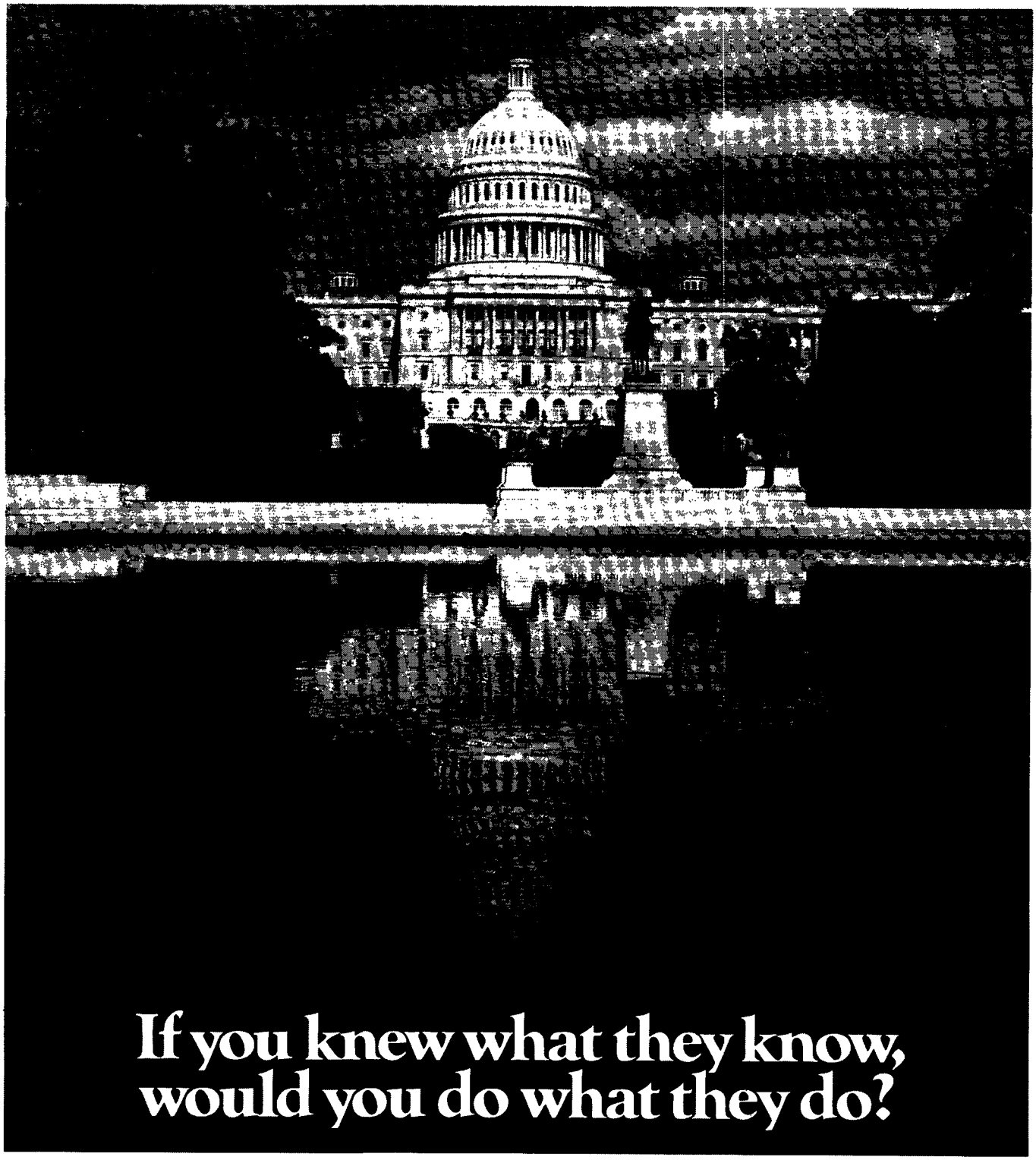

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Commentary
March 1996

Neoconservatism: A Eulogy

Norman Podhoretz

IN PROPOSING to deliver a eulogy in honor of neoconservatism, I am obviously implying that it is dead. But is it? There are those who think that neoconservatism is still very much with us; if so, in rushing to eulogize it I could be fairly accused of staging a scene out of one of those buried-alive horror stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Others might say that instead of trying to bury neoconservatism alive, I have come to orate over an empty coffin; maybe neoconservatism is not dead but only temporarily missing, which would leave us with a kind of *corpus delecti* problem.

Among those who deny that neoconservatism is dead are its enemies on the Right, the so-called paleoconservatives, who have long regarded it as a sinister force—in both senses of the word sinister. To them, neoconservatism is not only wicked but, as *Human Events* put it recently in an attack on the new *Weekly Standard* and its editor William Kristol, a "sort of . . . Trojan Horse . . . , a vehicle for moving the [Republican] party leftward." Conversely, many of the enemies of neoconservatism on the Left—who, despite the sectarian animosities that have lately infected the conservative movement, are much more numerous than its enemies on the Right—see it as the driving force behind everything symbolized by the name of Newt Gingrich.

Nor is it only the enemies of neoconservatism who deny that it is dead. Many of its friends do the same—a denial that in their case is mainly motivated by the wish to deprive its enemies of the joy they must feel at such wonderful news. But the liberal enemies of neoconservatism have no reason to rejoice at the news of its death because, as I hope to show, the legacy it has left behind will continue to plague them for a very long time to come. Which is to say that as between neoconservatism's enemies on the Right, to whom it is a leftist Trojan Horse, and its enemies on the Left, who can perceive not a dime's worth of difference between the neoconservatives and Newt Gingrich and his troops, it is its enemies on the Left who are closer to the truth.

BUT LET me first explain why I believe that neoconservatism *is* dead—by which, reverting from metaphor to straightforward denotation, I mean quite simply that it no longer exists as a distinctive phenomenon requiring a special name of its own. And perhaps the best place to begin such an explanation is with the name itself.

"Neo" of course means new, suggesting that neoconservatism was a new kind of conservatism; and so it was. But before counting the ways in which it was new, I want to correct a

NORMAN PODHORETZ, *a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, was the editor-in-chief of* COMMENTARY *for 35 years and is now its editor-at-large. The present article is a revised and expanded version of the Bradley Lecture Mr. Podhoretz delivered in January at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.*

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common error concerning the name itself. I have no idea who first coined it, but I do know that, despite what almost everyone seems to think, it was not invented by the late Michael Harrington toward the end of the 60's. In 1963, when I was still on the Left, I beat Harrington to the punch by applying the term to Walter Lippmann, Clinton Rossiter, and a number of others who, I wrote then, were "overimpressed with the evil propensities of man and underimpressed with the possibility of political and social arrangements that would encourage the development of the human potentiality for good instead of concentrating on restraint of the bad." But early though I was, I cannot claim to be the original author of the term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces it back to a 1960 review in the British monthly *Encounter* by G.L. Arnold (the pseudonym adopted for a time by the late George Lichtheim), while a recent letter in the (London) *Times Literary Supplement* finds an even earlier appearance in a piece by Dwight Macdonald published in the *Reporter* in 1952.

It is true, however, that the term neoconservative only entered into widespread usage in the late 60's after Harrington and some of his socialist comrades applied it to a group of intellectuals who had just begun voicing serious doubts about the leftist ideas and policies they themselves had helped to develop and propagate in the years just past.

The newness of neoconservatism begins, then, with the people who made up this movement—or tendency, as I prefer to describe it, since it never had or aspired to the kind of central organization characteristic of a movement. In talking about those people, it is impossible to avoid Irving Kristol's definition of a neoconservative as a liberal who has been mugged by reality. Yet famous though this definition has become, there is something slightly misleading about it.

No doubt a goodly number of the people who came to be known as neoconservatives had formerly been liberals; but what is often overlooked under the influence of Kristol's irresistible witticism is that many had also once been radicals. In fact, the most notable example was Kristol himself, who had gone through a Trotskyist phase in his youth in the 30's—a very brief phase, but decisive in his intellectual formation. I am another example. As I have often complained, Kristol and I are widely taken to be the same person; but one of the several ways in which we differ is age. Being ten years younger than he, I was born too late to get involved in the old radicalism of the 30's. I did, however, make up for this deprivation by becoming intellectually active in the new radicalism of the early 60's before breaking ranks with it and entering into a *de-facto* alliance with the neoconservatives which in due course became *de-jure*. And in the age cohort about ten years or so below me, a substantial number of latter-day Trotskyists—or should I call them neo-Trotskyists?—known as Schachtmanites drifted closer and closer to the neoconservatives in the late 60's and early 70's and ended by becoming indistinguishable from them.

NEOCONSERVATISM IS usually identified as a movement of New York Jewish intellectuals, and there is no question that the ex-radicals who became neoconservatives were mostly intellectuals of Jewish birth who came from or worked in New York. But for whatever it may be worth by way of sociological illumination, I would point out that the *liberals* who were mugged by reality into neoconservatism were mostly non-Jews like James Q. Wilson, Daniel P. Moynihan, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, Richard J. Neuhaus, William J. Bennett, and George Weigel. And for whatever additional illumination it may provide, except for Jeane Kirkpatrick and Richard Neuhaus, all were not only Gentile but Catholic—and Neuhaus would later remove himself from the short list of exceptions by leaving the Lutheran church and going over to Rome.

Most members of this group—along with some of the ex-radicals—tended to reject the label neoconservative. Not only did they consider it pejorative (in those prehistoric days, people actually regarded the term liberal as an honorific and contended fiercely for possession of it), they also thought it was wrong. So far as they were concerned, they were indeed still liberals, fighting to reclaim the traditional principles of liberalism from the leftists who had hijacked and corrupted it. Most of them also remained members of the Democratic party, supporters of Hubert Humphrey (the liberal anti-Communist Humphrey of the 50's, not the Humphrey who went Left in the last years of his life) and especially the great cold warrior Henry "Scoop" Jackson who, they vainly hoped, would rescue the party from the McGovernite forces that took it over in 1972 and return it to its old Trumanesque glory.

Nevertheless, nothing these people could say or do prevented them from being called neocon-

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servatives by everyone else, and most of them, with varying degrees of reluctance, eventually surrendered to the name. They did so because despite their best efforts and fondest wishes, the word liberal had been so successfully coopted by the Left that applying it to themselves could only confuse and mislead. Or, as Moynihan recently put it, the neoconservatives were like "good Catholics who were excommunicated and who said, finally, OK, we're Protestants."

BUT THE neoconservatives brought something new to conservatism besides their own persons. They were not converts who earnestly and faithfully and humbly—certainly not humbly—embraced an established faith. If they had been converts of that stripe, there might have been some justification in the speech once delivered by a paleoconservative professor who, upset by all the attention the neoconservatives were getting, declared that while he had nothing against welcoming this repentant whore into the church, he violently objected to turning over the pulpit to her. But the malice here was misplaced, because the neoconservatives were not applying for admission to an established church. They were, rather, caught up in the process of shaping a perspective of their own that differed in important respects from the older varieties of American conservatism.

Thus, in the area of domestic policy, the neoconservatives dissociated themselves from the wholesale opposition to the welfare state which had marked American conservatism since the days of the New Deal. Unlike the older schools of American conservatism, they were not for abolishing the welfare state but only for setting certain limits to it. Those limits did not, in their view, involve issues of principle, such as the legitimate size and role of the central government in the American constitutional order. Rather, they were to be determined by practical considerations, such as the precise point at which the incentive to work was undermined by the availability of welfare benefits, or the point at which the redistribution of income began to erode economic growth, or the point at which egalitarianism came into serious conflict with liberty.

A related distinction between neoconservatism and the older varieties of conservatism lay in their differing attitudes toward the labor movement. The older conservatives were uniformly hostile to labor unions, both in principle and in practice, whereas the neoconservatives remained as friendly to the labor movement as they had been in their days on the Left.

There were many reasons for this, some nostalgic and atavistic, rooted in the working-class background out of which many neoconservatives came. But perhaps the most important reason of all had nothing whatever to do with personal sentiment or domestic affairs. It was the fact that the leadership of the labor movement was so staunchly anti-Communist. Since anti-Communism was the ruling passion of the neoconservatives in foreign affairs, they were naturally drawn into an alliance with the AFL-CIO, which in those days was as passionately anti-Communist as they.

Now, it goes without saying that all the older varieties of conservatives were ardently anti-Communist as well. But as Richard Gid Powers points out in *Not Without Honor*, his new history of American anti-Communism, they tended to worry less about aggression from the outside than about the threat of internal subversion; and in tracking down the sources of that threat, they were not, to put it gently, always scrupulous in distinguishing among the various factions on the Left. The truth is that in their heart of hearts most of the older conservatives simply did not believe that anyone on the slippery slopes of the Left, let alone a "labor agitator," could really be an anti-Communist.

Conversely, they found it hard to believe that businessmen who contributed large sums of money to the Republican party and made the right noises about taxes and government regulation could be less than fully committed to the struggle against Communism. Yet, hard to believe or not, the business community did on the whole support the policy of détente with the Soviet Union and the opening to China pursued by the Nixon and Ford administrations. For, as George Will would later say of the bankers during the Polish crisis of the early 80's, they loved commerce more than they loathed Communism.

The neoconservatives did not love commerce, or anything else, more than they loathed Communism; nor did their allies in the labor movement. Few businessmen, and few Republicans for that matter, had ever met a Communist. Some of them seemed to think that the Soviet Union was one huge regulatory agency, a sort of gigantic Federal Trade Commission armed with nuclear weapons (which was about as close as they could come to an image of absolute evil). Others were so temperamentally remote from and unfamiliar

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with the phenomenon of ideological fervor that they thought the Soviets could in effect be bribed out of Communism by the right business deals.

No such illusions ever clouded the minds either of the neoconservative intellectuals or of their allies in the labor movement. They had all had first-hand experience of one kind or another with Communism; they knew it for the evil totalitarian system it was; they knew how it operated; and they knew how to contend with it.

IT IS instructive in this connection to remind ourselves that Ronald Reagan had been a labor leader, and had fought the Communists in that capacity; and Reagan can also be considered one of the first neoconservatives, having been a liberal Democrat for most of his political life and then becoming a Republican only at the age of fifty-one. And it is even more instructive in this same context to ponder a wonderful anecdote, possibly apocryphal, about Ernest Bevin, the British labor leader who became Foreign Secretary just in time to attend the summit conference with Stalin at Potsdam in 1945. Though Bevin had never before participated in an international negotiation, he had spent years fighting the attempts by the British Communist party to take over the local trade unions. Asked upon returning from Potsdam what the Russians were like, he replied, "They're just like the Communists."

The neoconservatives in America, too, knew that the Russians were just like the Communists they had been fighting for so long (in some instances, after having once been Communists themselves). Among other things, this meant they understood that the Soviet Union was not a "normal" imperial power, merely seeking its place in the international sun, and that it was a great mistake—moral no less than political—to treat it as such.

In other words, the neoconservatives understood that the Soviet Union had more in common with the revolutionary and expansionist pre-World War II Germany under Hitler than with the authoritarian but non-revolutionary pre-World War I Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm. And so it was they who led the attack against an American policy based on the Wilhelmine model, the policy of détente, and it was they who also took the lead in making the case against the correlative delusions of arms control and for a stronger national defense in response to the great Soviet arms build-up of the 70's.

Another issue of foreign policy on which the neoconservatives differed from the older schools of conservatism was Israel. Some older conservatives were, for religious reasons, uncomfortable with the idea of Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land; to others the Jewish state was a parasitical and untrustworthy socialist country. But the neoconservatives saw Israel as a highly vulnerable outpost and surrogate of the West in a strategically vital region, and they interpreted the fierce assault on its legitimacy as part of the ideological offensive against the democratic world led and orchestrated by the Soviet Union. Thus, while their enthusiastic support of Israel was often attributed to the fact that so many neoconservatives were Jewish, the truth was that it had at least as much if not more to do with the fact that they were anti-Communists.

FINALLY, THERE was the realm of culture. If anti-Communism was the ruling passion of the neoconservatives in foreign affairs, opposition to the counterculture of the 1960's was their ruling passion at home. Indeed, I suspect that revulsion against the counterculture accounted for more converts to neoconservatism than any other single factor.

This revulsion was not only directed against the counterculture itself; it was also inspired by the abject failure of the great institutions of the liberal community to resist the counterculture. First the universities capitulated, then the national media, and finally even the Democratic party. In part the problem was simple moral cowardice, but in part it was the sheer inability of these institutions to defend themselves intellectually when they came under attack. William Phillips, the editor of *Partisan Review*, once told the British critic Kenneth Tynan, who was throwing hoary Marxist arguments in his face, that these arguments were so old he couldn't remember the answers. Well, neither could the great institutions of American liberalism remember the answers when the counterculture assaulted them as bastions of oppression and repression, pillars of a society so rotten that it was beyond help through reform and so far gone that it had to be destroyed before it could be saved.

Here too, as with the strictly political battles involving policy toward the Soviet Union and the Communist world in general, the neoconservatives enjoyed a great advantage over other conservatives in being intimately familiar with the sources of the enemy's arguments and attitudes.

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In this case the sources were the adversary culture of modernist literature, avant-garde art, and bohemian libertinism, on which many neoconservatives had themselves cut their cultural teeth. Some of *them* may have forgotten the answers; but under the pressure of the countercultural assault, they quickly began to remember, or in some instances to discover for the first time, why American society and its sustaining institutions were worth defending—or, to state it more strongly and more accurately, why the traditional values of the bourgeois democratic order were superior to any of the known alternatives.

Among the sustaining institutions worth defending was capitalism, which needed defending in those days if anything did. So tarnished had its reputation become—even among conservatives, and even among capitalists themselves—that it dared not speak its name. At a time when so many other formerly forbidden practices were noisily coming out of their respective closets and shouting their names from every rooftop and every talk show, the proponents of capitalism were still evasively resorting to euphemisms like "free enterprise" or the "market system" or the "free market." And little wonder: the word "capitalism," like "neoconservatism" after it, was first employed (in the early 19th century) mainly as a term of abuse, and still carried strongly pejorative connotations.

It was the neoconservatives who decided that the time had come to drag capitalism out of the closet. In doing so, they defiantly revived the name as part of an aggressive campaign to demonstrate not only that capitalism was far better than socialism at producing wealth, but that it even managed to distribute it more widely; and not only that it was good in itself, being a form of freedom, but that it was also a great bulwark against totalitarianism.

Admittedly, there was at first a limit to the enthusiasm with which the neoconservatives pressed this campaign. Irving Kristol, for instance, could only bring himself to give (in the title of one of his books) *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. But Michael Novak later made up for this in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, where he gave it the equivalent of four, bringing the neoconservative average up to the full and proper measure of three.*

THIS, THEN, is the list of things that made neoconservatism new and different. It is in looking over the list today that I find it hard to escape the conclusion that this phenomenon no longer exists as a distinctive thing in itself, requiring a special name of its own.

Begin again with the people. If the neoconservatives were new to conservatism when they first appeared on the scene, there is self-evidently nothing new about them today, 25 or 30 years later. Irving Kristol is known as the godfather of neoconservatism, but by now he might more accurately be called its grandfather, since there is not only a second generation to the manner born, but yet another hungry generation in the wings already preparing to tread that one down.

Neoconservatism is even old enough to have spawned several generations of defectors. At one end, a few of the founding fathers, including Daniel P. Moynihan and Daniel Bell, have broken with it entirely. Moynihan has reverted to the liberalism he always insisted he had never abandoned, while Bell has gone back to whatever it is he has gone back to. And at the other end, a couple of young people have lately been furthering their journalistic careers by denouncing the neoconservatives who launched those careers in the first place, thereby demonstrating how much nourishment can be had under the right circumstances from biting the hand that has fed you.

In addition to losing its newness simply by virtue of having been around for a long time, neoconservatism has also been losing its ideological distinctiveness. If it originally differed from the older varieties of conservatism in wishing to reform rather than abolish the welfare state, few traces of that difference remain visible today. By now most neoconservatives have pretty well given up on the welfare state—by which, as they see it, American society has been mugged just as surely as they themselves once were by reality. They may disagree with other schools of conservative thought, and with one another, over the best and most humane way to phase out particular features of the welfare state, or over the question of whether states can do a better job than the federal government in administering social policy. But there is hardly any disagreement over the harm the welfare state has done in fostering illegitimacy and all the terrible social pathologies that flow from babies having babies. Nor is there

*George Gilder, in *Wealth and Poverty*, went Novak at least one better, but never having been on the Left, Gilder was not, strictly speaking, a neoconservative. Nor was Peter L. Berger, who, in *The Capitalist Revolution*, came closer to Kristol's two than to Novak's four or Gilder's five.

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any disagreement over the desirability of working to get rid of the welfare state, or at least as much of it as is politically possible.

There is an instructive parallel here with the defectors from Stalinism in the 20's and 30's who became Trotskyists. These Trotskyists regarded the Stalinists as betrayers of the revolution; they, by contrast, were the true Communists, the true heirs of Marx and Lenin. The Stalinists, for their part, regarded the Trotskyists as thoroughgoing traitors to the Communist cause who were only using Trotsky as a way-station into the anti-Communist camp. Of course, the language used by the Stalinists against the Trotskyists was much more violent and vituperative than I have indicated, but in a fair number of cases the substance of the accusation turned out to be justified: many of the Trotskyists did wind up in the anti-Communist camp. Similarly with the analogous charge hurled against the neoconservatives by their former political friends on the Left—namely, that for all their protestations, the neoconservatives were not really the true heirs of pre-60's American liberalism but rather apostates on the road to the Right. Where the welfare state and social engineering in general are concerned, it must be acknowledged that this accusation was on the mark.

On the other hand, with regard to another major issue of domestic social policy—namely, affirmative action—the opposite was true. The neoconservatives fought against affirmative action from the very beginning, and precisely on the ground that it represented a violation of the traditional liberal principle that every individual should be treated on his own merits as an individual and not as a member of a group. Here the neoconservatives really were the true defenders of pre-60's liberalism in the face of a policy built on the rejection by the Left of a fundamental element of the liberal creed. And here, in contrast to what happened with the issue of the welfare state, it was the older schools of conservative thought that came around to the neoconservative position.

Thus it was that some on the Right who had opposed the civil-rights movement even before it was radicalized in the late 60's, and who had never had any use for Martin Luther King, Jr. when he was alive, later learned under the tutelage of the neoconservatives that one of the most effective weapons they could wield in the fight against affirmative action was King's dream of a world in which all would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. In this way many conservatives came to embrace the ideals which had animated the civil-rights movement during what the late Bayard Rustin called its "heroic period," and which the neoconservatives continued to uphold even when the most vocal leaders of the black community itself had turned to a very different set of ideas. This belated conversion of a large part of the conservative movement, however, again had the effect of robbing neoconservatism of ideological distinctiveness, if from the other direction.

IN FOREIGN affairs, neoconservatism has lost not so much its distinctiveness within the larger conservative community as its own internal identity. Among some of the older varieties of conservatism, the end of the cold war has led to a resurgence of isolationism. This is less surprising than it may seem, since it was only the fight against Communism that drew many conservatives out of their traditionally isolationist shell in the first place (just as it was only the fight against Nazism that drew many liberals out of *their* isolationist shell). With the Soviet Union gone, and with China not yet a threat, these traditionally isolationist conservatives have begun returning, as it were, to normalcy.

On this point, at least, we can say that the neoconservatives are still different. For if there is a neoconservative extant who has become an isolationist, I do not know where to find him. At the same time, though, I can think of only a tiny handful who still advocate the expansive Wilsonian interventionism that grew out of the anti-Communist passions of the neoconservatives at the height of the cold war, and that repeatedly trumped the prudential cautions of the realists among them. My impression is that today the realists have the upper hand in the neoconservative community, or what is left of it.

But whatever the precise balance of forces may be among these contending schools of thought, in foreign policy it has become impossible to define a neoconservative position. Once upon a time, I could foresee with reasonable assurance where any neoconservative would stand on almost any serious issue in world affairs. Today I am hard put to predict where even some of my closest friends will come out when a contentious issue like Bosnia arises, or on the question of NATO expansion, or on how to deal with China, or on whether to send American troops to the Golan Heights.

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As with the cold war, so with the culture war. Of course, unlike the cold war, the culture war rages on. But it has moved into a new phase in which the single most salient and most neuralgic issue is abortion; and on that issue a clear neoconservative position is as hard to define as it is in foreign affairs. I would guess that the great majority of neoconservatives consider themselves pro-life. I would also guess that most of them are uneasy with the absolutism of the pro-life movement. But these are only guesses. The fact is that I simply do not know where many of my friends stand on this issue. Despite what the paleoconservatives think, there is no clearly identifiable neoconservative position here.

To be sure, a new front in the culture war has recently opened on which most neoconservatives do seem to differ from other conservatives, and that is the issue of immigration. The conservative opponents of immigration argue that, unchecked, it will end by destroying the common culture which has given this country its character and held it together in all its diversity. The neoconservatives, myself emphatically included, disagree. In endless hours of private argument with Peter Brimelow and John O'Sullivan, the two leading conservative critics of current immigration policy, I have repeatedly pointed out—to no avail, naturally—that the same cultural anxiety they feel was expressed a century ago by the likes of Henry Adams, John Jay Chapman, and Henry James, and that it turned out to be unwarranted.

For example, in the course of a visit to the Lower East Side of New York in 1905, James persuaded himself that the Yiddish-speaking masses there were an "agency of future ravage" that would topple "the consecrated English tradition" and transform the English language itself beyond recognition: "Whatever we shall know it for," he sighed, "certainly, we shall not know it for English." But the joke was on James, if a joke it was, for perhaps his most devoted, and maybe even his only, readers in the generations ahead would be the children and grandchildren of these agents of future ravage, alarming numbers of whom would go on to produce doctoral dissertations on, precisely, the novels of Henry James.

On immigration, then, we may again have something resembling a distinctive neoconservative position. Nevertheless, important though this issue is, it is not in my judgment enough by itself to bring neoconservatism back to life.

HAVING BEEN a neoconservative for so long that I ought perhaps to be called a paleo-neoconservative, I have good reason to mourn the passing of this movement or tendency. And yet I must confess that its death seems to me more an occasion for celebration than for sadness. For what killed neoconservatism was not defeat but victory; it died not of failure but of success.

Neoconservatism came into the world to combat the dangerous lies that were being spread by the radicalism of the 60's and that were being accepted as truth by the established liberal institutions of the day. More passionately and more effectively than any other group, the neoconservatives exposed those lies for what they were: expressions of hatred, rooted in utopian greed, for life as it is lived in this country, and weapons in a campaign to deprive it of the will to defend itself against its enemies in the world outside. And more passionately and more effectively than any other group, the neoconservatives undertook the job of rebuilding intellectual and moral confidence in the values and institutions on which American society rests, not to mention the actual physical defenses on which the country's security depends. That effort, extending over a quarter of a century and more, and seeming utterly quixotic when it was launched in the late 60's, succeeded to so great an extent that the neoconservatives were left, like Othello, with their occupation gone.

Take what I have identified as the two ruling passions of neoconservatism—its anti-Communism and its revulsion against the counterculture. With respect to the former, I would note that, as against the claim that no one foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union, the neoconservatives, driven by their anti-Communist passions and ideas, argued that the entire purpose of a more determined resistance to Soviet power was to encourage the forces of disintegration that had become visible within the Soviet empire and even within the Soviet heartland itself.

I would not deny that the neoconservatives were as surprised as everyone else by the speed with which the Soviet Union eventually collapsed. But it was they themselves who had held out the promise of just such a collapse, as the ultimate reward of the policy they consistently urged on Ronald Reagan: a military build-up, combined with an ideological offensive, and capped by an active challenge to the widespread notion that the West had an interest in the maintenance of the Soviet empire. (And Reagan, inci-

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dentally, though he needed no urging to accept this line of argument, did need a good deal of urging as President to follow through on it.) So, surprised though they were by how fast the Soviet Union collapsed, the neoconservatives were not surprised by the collapse itself. They felt vindicated by it, and rightly so.

As for their other ruling passion, I think we can claim that the defense the neoconservatives mounted of American society and its traditional values against the frontal assaults of the counterculture ended with a victory that in its own modest way resembled the victory of the West over Communism in the cold war. Who today shies away from the word capitalism, or denies that it is superior to socialism both in producing wealth and distributing it? Who today celebrates free and easy sex as the road to health and happiness? Who today promotes drugs as the gateway to a higher consciousness? Today family values are all the rage, even among feminists, and indeed even among homosexuals, who have gone from celebrating the "joys of gay sex" to demanding that they be permitted to participate in the joys of married life.

I have no desire to adopt a triumphalist tone, or to suggest that there is no conservative work left to do. On the contrary, in the realm of domestic social policy it is obvious that only a beginning has been made on the work of the conservative revolution—or, rather, counterrevolution. (I prefer the latter term since the purpose of this movement is to dismantle the structures created by the liberal revolution of the past 50 years, and left largely intact even when Republicans came to power, and even after many Democrats had themselves lost faith in them.) But while neoconservatives are deeply involved in the work of the counterrevolution in domestic social policy, they are, as I have already indicated, no longer acting in that area as *neo*conservatives.

And then there is the even more recalcitrant realm of culture. There, the *naked* anti-Americanism which the neoconservatives devoted so much energy to combating has been discredited in its original forms. But at the same time it has mutated into insidious new shapes and thereby acquired a new lease on life, especially in the universities, where the assault on the traditions and values of this society comes disguised, under the name of multiculturalism, as an innocent effort to give their belated due to previously excluded ethnic and sexual minorities.

Nor is the lingering influence of the counterculture confined to the universities. The hostility it bred toward this country—toward its history and toward the values and the moral standards by which it has always tried to live—has been seeping down into secondary- and even elementary-school curricula and classrooms. That same hostility now pervades the mainline churches, the great liberal foundations, and even such formerly staid institutions as the Smithsonian. And in the world of the arts, it enjoys the status of a complacently unchallenged orthodoxy.

Here, too, an enormous amount of conservative work remains to be done—so much, indeed, that in contemplating it I begin to wonder whether I have overstated the extent of neoconservative success in this area. Be that particular accounting as it may, however, there is a big difference between the situation in the period of the neoconservative ascendancy and the situation today. For thanks to the influence of neoconservatism on the conservative movement in general, the philistine indifference to culture which once pervaded that movement is largely gone. Everyone is now so fully alive to the importance of the cultural realm that the neoconservatives are no longer alone on the field of battle contesting ground that to many older conservatives seemed hardly worth taking. We are all Gramscians now.

ANOTHER WAY of putting all this is to say that the conservative work which remains to be done in every realm will be marked and guided and shaped by the legacy neoconservatism has left behind. That legacy has wrought a profound change in the scope and the character and the ethos of American conservatism.

It is a legacy of emphasis, of ideas, and of people. The emphasis is the emphasis on the role of culture and—increasingly as the years have rolled by—on religion as the root and fount of the cultural issues that have moved from the periphery to the center of the national debate. Almost from the moment the neoconservatives appeared on the scene, they began speaking, in Nathan Glazer's famous phrase, of "the limits of social policy," and they began reminding us, in the words of the great couplet from Dr. Johnson that I myself have always loved to quote:

> How small, of all that human hearts endure,
> That part, which laws or kings can cause or cure!

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This reminder was scarcely heeded in a period when everything was being politicized, when all problems were thought to have solutions, and all solutions were believed to lie in the political realm. But today it is finally taking hold, and it will become even more important as the exaggerated expectations once invested in "laws or kings" give way, as they have already started doing, to a new sense of the overriding importance of moral and spiritual factors both in causing and in curing—insofar as they can be cured—the ills of the human condition.

As to the ideas that neoconservatism has left behind, they are ideas about the history and the nature of American society and the American polity—what makes this country tick, and how and why it has managed to provide more freedom and more prosperity to a greater share of its populace than any other on earth. And as to the people, they are people whose intellectual and political skills were developed and sharpened and energized by contact with the special style of discourse that the neoconservatives brought with them from the Left and into the conservative movement.

A word about that style. Hard to describe and harder still to define, it is nevertheless easy to perceive in the primacy it gives and the loyalty it accords to ideas over the details of policy or the demands of party. It is also readily recognizable from the way it synthesizes a number of qualities that are rarely found together, let alone coexisting in such perfect harmony. It is, at its best, exuberantly polemical and combative, and yet always careful to deal honestly with the case against which it is contending; it seeks to marry ideological passion to intellectual disinterestedness; it gives vent to a heated sense of urgency about the present moment while maintaining a sense of historical perspective; and it aims to be simultaneously illuminating to the specialist and accessible to the common reader. Though neoconservatism no longer exists as a unique school of thought, this intellectual style, which has always marked it as unmistakably as the political positions it took, is vibrantly alive in the pages of a classically neoconservative magazine like COMMENTARY, and it is already setting its stamp on the *Weekly Standard* where, as I reported earlier, it has been mistaken for a leftist Trojan horse.

SURELY NOTHING is here to make the enemies of neoconservatism happy. Instead, I would say, borrowing from John Milton's lament over the death of Samson:

> Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
> Nor much more cause, Samson . . .
> hath finish'd
> A life Heroic, on his Enemies
> Fully reveng'd, hath left them years
> of mourning.

And to the veterans of the neoconservative battalions and their friends and heirs, I would say, still borrowing from *Samson Agonistes*, that

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no
> contempt,
> Dispraise or blame, nothing but well
> and fair
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

But perhaps the tragic Miltonic mode is too elevated for the occasion at hand. In addressing the immediate neoconservative community, then, I will descend from these poetical sublimities and simply express my conviction that it is right and proper and healthy to recognize and openly to acknowledge the end when it comes, the better to make a new beginning in the living spirit of what has passed. I mean to say that this is not a time for mourning or for apprehension or for anxiety, but a time for satisfaction over a just war well fought, and a time for rejoicing in a series of victories that cleared the way and set the stage for other victories in the years to come. In those victories of the future, I believe that the legacy, and the legatees, of neoconservatism, now zestfully thriving all around us, will play as indispensable a part as did the neoconservatives themselves in achieving the victories of the past.

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Is the Republican Revolution Alive?

Irwin M. Stelzer

"I READ the newspapers avidly. It is my one form of continuous fiction." So said Labor's fiery Welsh postwar Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan. And he had not had the pleasure of reading the political obituaries of the Republican revolution that have intermittently become the stuff of our daily newspapers and weekly magazines.

The gist of the death notices goes something like this: the battle over the budget has revealed to the American people that the new Republican Congress lacks any hint of compassion; that in its zeal to balance the budget it has lost sight of the real needs of, variously, the elderly (Medicare), the poor (Medicaid), the young (education-funding), the disadvantaged (welfare), indeed, everyone who breathes (environmental regulation); and that, in its rush to lower taxes, it has engaged in a plot to divert resources from the needy into the pockets of the already affluent.

But, the obit continues, there is also good news: American voters have either already awakened or surely will soon awake from the stupor into which they momentarily lapsed in the 1994 elections; they have gotten or will get over the childish tantrum that induced them to throw votes at Republican candidates; and they will return in their legions to the fold of the Democrats, whose leader, Bill Clinton now enjoys a comfortable lead over his most likely opponent, Bob Dole, in all opinion polls.

This particular funeral procession, however, is premature. Whether or not the new Republican program does indeed constitute a "revolution," as that term is generally understood, it is surely not dead. Nor is it likely to expire from wounds inflicted by the President and the Democrats. Indeed, it is nearer the truth to say that the revolution has triumphed—at least so far, and at least in major part. Whether that victory can be consolidated and extended is another question.

CONSIDER FIRST the triumphs. Shorn of detail, the Republicans' Contract With America had three major goals: to restore fiscal sanity to the federal budget; to devolve power from Washington to units of government closer to the people; and to begin the process of (to borrow a term from Gertrude Himmelfarb) remoralizing America. The President himself, in his State of the Union address this past January, all but conceded that the revolution had achieved much of what it set out to do when he pronounced the end of the era of big, high-spending government, extolled family values, and denounced the immorality of much popular culture.

That Gingrich's troops have won the budget battle is beyond dispute. Spend-borrow-and-tax is no longer a viable platform for an American

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politician. Nor is it any longer quite so easy to substitute for federal spending by loading the costs of favored programs onto America's corporations, in the hope that the public will not realize this particular piper has to be paid in the form of higher prices, fewer jobs, or both. It would be a brave politician, indeed, who would propose a new social program on the scale of any of the major components of today's welfare state and suggest that its cost be met either by new taxes or by issuing a new batch of government IOU's.

Equally significant, no politician, not even one as skilled in wrapping himself in the mantle of compassion as Bill Clinton, can expect lengthy tenure on the federal payroll unless he bows, or at least is seen to bow, to the public demand that someday, somehow, the federal budget be brought into balance. Clinton did try to resist this demand, and failed, retreating first to a pledge to balance the budget in ten years, then nine, then eight, before finally and reluctantly capitulating to the Republicans' seven-year timetable.

That surrender to the forces of fiscal rectitude is made all the more surprising, and the Republicans' triumph all the more complete and astonishing, by the fact that the case for draconian efforts to balance the budget is far from compelling. For one thing, the federal deficit is already falling, both in absolute terms and relative to the nation's ability to carry its debt. In 1995, for example, when the government spent $164 billion more than it took in, the shortfall came to only 2.3 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); in the fiscal year ending this October, estimates are that the deficit will fall further to $120 billion, or 1.6 percent of GDP. These figures compare with a deficit of $290 billion, or 4.9 percent of GDP, in 1992 and $203 billion, or 3.1 percent, in 1994.*

More important, the federal budget fails to distinguish between expenses and investments; if it did, the "deficit" would be far less terrifying than it seems to the untutored eye. Thus, an extravagant trip to India by the Secretary of Energy and her entourage adds as much to the federal deficit as a similar sum spent to buy equipment for the nation's outgunned law-enforcement officers, or to shore up some bit of the nation's transport infrastructure. It is as if an individual were to count, as one and the same, money spent for a night on the town and money spent to increase the capital value of his home.

Finally, the notion that the deficit automatically places an unfair burden on future generations, thereby stunting the economic opportunities available to "our children and our grandchildren," is nonsense. Ronald Reagan ran up huge deficits in order to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that it had no hope of competing with the United States as a superpower. He thereby willed to our children and grandchildren both a large pile of IOU's *and* a nation no longer under threat of nuclear annihilation. In short, it is not the fact of a deficit but how the money is spent that determines whether the present generation has unjustly enriched itself at the expense of its progeny.

All this is undoubtedly what Jack Kemp had in mind when, in 1981, he declared, "The Republican party no longer worships at the altar of a balanced budget." Indeed, it is even possible to make an intellectually respectable argument in favor of a perpetually *un*balanced budget. For, so long as the economy grows more rapidly than the cost of carrying the national debt, that carrying cost will place a relatively diminishing burden on the nation's resources.

But so complete has been the triumph of the Republican revolution that even politicians sympathetic to continued deficit financing dare not say so, even in defense of policies which, in their liberal hearts, they favor. Instead, they have been reduced to quibbling over which programs to cut, by how much, and by when. Watch their lips: no new taxes, no new borrowing—at least not so long as the new, Republican-imposed fiscal ethos prevails.

The significance of this victory goes beyond money. Traditional Republicans, those who learned their conservatism at the feet of Senator Robert Taft and his intellectual progeny, may have been drawn to the idea of a balanced budget by the simple notion that no household—and, by extension, no government—can survive if its outlays consistently exceed its income. But Gingrich's troops are driven by a far different vision.

To them, the budget deficit is not an evil in and of itself; if it were, they would be less willing than they are to increase it by cutting taxes in a

*For perspective, the superconservative German fiscal authorities have decreed that only those European nations capable of reducing their fiscal deficits to 3 percent of GDP will be permitted to join Europe's projected single currency. The U.S. already meets this stringent standard, which is more than most other industrialized nations, including Germany itself, can claim.

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manner that has no hope of increasing the flow of revenues into the Treasury. (More on this below.) Rather, they see the deficit as an issue around which to rally the forces of less government. As even so new and uncertain a recruit to the revolution as Bob Dole has put it, "This is not a debate about numbers, it's about policies." Bill Clinton has formulated the same point with greater heat: the House conservatives "want to end the role of the federal government in our lives."

I would put it still differently. This is, in fact, a debate about "compassion," and how to show it. Do we demonstrate compassion by engaging in massive income transfers from the more productive members of society to those in financial or other difficulties (whether impoverished teenage mothers or rich holders of Mexican IOU's)? Or, alternatively, do we demonstrate compassion by encouraging our citizens to assume responsibility for the consequences of their own behavior, so that when they do need help from their government, they will need it only on a temporary basis and as a last resort?

It is the triumph of the latter vision over the long-dominant consensus in favor of the former that makes the Republican victory in the budget battle so telling. For, unless the voters decide otherwise by returning control of the House and the Senate to the Democrats later this year, the agreement to balance the budget *is* an agreement to contain the scale and scope of the federal government. Whatever the outcome of specific fights over so-called entitlements, we will get less government in the future than we have had in the past.

THE SECOND goal of the Republican revolution—power to the people, or, at least, power closer to the people—has also been achieved, at least in good measure. With the help of a bipartisan group of governors, the Republicans have already made it extraordinarily difficult for the federal government to continue the dishonorable practice of imposing mandates on the states without providing the funds with which to meet those mandates.

Again, the significance of this victory extends far beyond the dollars immediately involved. For the unfunded state mandate was the last refuge of liberals in search of money, a truly free lunch for any national politician with a new idea but without the will or the ability to impose new taxes on the public or new regulations on business. By making it highly unlikely that such unfunded mandates will receive the necessary congressional approval, the Republicans have cut off the last available source of liberal oxygen. This has not been lost on the press: as the *Washington Post* lamented, "President Bill Clinton must confront the reality that will face every occupant of the Oval Office for the foreseeable future: he has no money to play with anymore."

Whether the Republicans will be as successful in increasing the independence of state governments by transferring to them power now held in Washington is less certain. The President, for one, seems determined to prevent the conversion of federal entitlement programs into block grants to the states. Still, even he has found it necessary to give more and more waivers from federal rules governing the administration of social programs, and he has thereby willy-nilly restored to the states some of their earlier role as laboratories of democracy, freer to develop locally appropriate ways of defining just how government shall intervene in the lives of its citizens.

It matters little that the proposed Republican "devolution" may end up transferring authority from an unresponsive federal bureaucracy to perhaps still less responsive and less efficient bureaucracies in the 50 state capitals. Or that an aggrieved citizen who can hold his Congressman responsible for some act of bureaucratic nonfeasance will probably not know the name of the state assemblyman against whom to retaliate. So far, the devolutionary drive seems immune to such practical criticism. Bob Dole, who has spent a long lifetime participating in the expansion of federal power, now carries with him a copy of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, reserving unenumerated powers to the several states and to the people; he receives loud approbation whenever he cites it as one of the bedrocks of his political philosophy. For that matter, even Vice President Al Gore found it necessary to deny that he was defending the status quo when he proposed a series of cosmetic changes under the rubric of "reinventing government."

WHICH BRINGS us to the third leg of the revolution's stool, the pledge to re-moralize America.

There is certainly no gainsaying public alarm over the consequences of the fraying of the traditional family, over teenage pregnancy, over the lurid excrescences of popular culture, over street

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crime, over the failings of the public-education system, or over a host of other features of contemporary life. The Republicans—or here I should more properly say the conservatives—saw their opportunity, took it, and won.

William J. Bennett brought mighty Time Warner to its knees, forcing it to dispose of its gangsta-rap subsidiary and thereby to withdraw corporate America's tacit approval of calls for the slaughter of policemen and the degradation of women, especially black women. Calvin Klein had to reconsider advertisements employing seemingly prepubescent models to sell underwear. According to the *American Enterprise*, even the talk-show host Geraldo Rivera has registered the shift in public mood concerning "transsexuals and other sexually related" themes that are the staples of his genre. *Electronic Media*, an industry bible, reports that "virtually unanimously stations are saying they've had it with talk shows," and credits Bennett's criticisms for the change. Finally, even Hollywood seems to have gotten the message, and to have begun to train its sights on the market for "family entertainment."

This is hardly to say that the culture these conservatives find so offensive has been wiped away, or that violence on TV and movie screens will soon be reduced to a custard pie in the face, and sexual displays to a goodnight peck on the cheek. But taken together with the eagerness of politicians, including President Clinton, to endorse Dan Quayle's once-mocked "Murphy Brown" speech, *and* with the recent commercial failure of some of the more violent and sexually peculiar Hollywood offerings, *and* with the newfound religion of television producers who pride themselves on being in tune with changes in public tastes and fashion, it certainly seems safe to conclude that the Republicans can reasonably claim some gains in the culture wars.

So the revolution has kept its promises. But in the process, has it also, as its many critics claim, sown the seeds of its eventual defeat?

Perhaps it has. But if so, it is not because Bill Clinton is now ahead in the polls: Jimmy Carter led Ronald Reagan by 30 points at this time in the 1980 electoral cycle; and in 1988, so few voters had seriously focused on the impending Dukakis-Bush battle that as late as July of that year they were telling pollsters they favored the Massachusetts governor by 54 to 37 percent. Nor does anyone yet know what the ongoing Whitewater and "Travelgate" investigations will bring, or whether the Bosnian adventure will prove a fiasco, or what else may befall the White House in the run-up to the election.

No, the threat to the revolution comes not from portents contained in the polls but from the fact that strains are starting to appear in the coalition that propelled the Republicans into control of both the House and the Senate in 1994.

That coalition brought together economic conservatives who want to rein in the federal deficit and free up private and economic life, and social conservatives intensely concerned with pursuing their vision of a re-moralized America. What went unnoticed in the flush of victory was that these two groups had, and have, very different ideas as to the role of government. The economic conservatives want less of it: less regulation, lower taxes, fewer government agencies. The social conservatives want less of the sort of government they have been getting, but at least some of them want more of a different sort of government, one willing to set and enforce social values.

As it happens, the insistence on these values by social conservatives during the battle of the budget is what created the opportunity for Bill Clinton to wrap himself in the flag of "compassion." Cutting back on the welfare state was always going to be a politically difficult chore: general support for a balanced budget would not translate easily into support for cuts in specific programs, or even for slowing their rate of growth. The more deeply the Republicans had to cut, the greater the opposition would be. This was not, therefore, a moment to propose reducing taxes, especially after President Clinton had acquiesced in the general goal of a balanced budget. Enter the social conservatives and the child tax credit, which would, in fact, reduce each family's taxes by $500 per dependent child.

This proposal could not be justified on the ground that, by denying funds to the federal government, it would force it to spend less; the government was already promising to spend less. Nor could it be defended on supply-side grounds—namely, that it would stimulate risk-taking and harder work (aside from the work of child-rearing). Nor was there any hope that the credit, like a cut in the tax rate, would result in an increase in tax revenues, thereby "paying for itself." Nor, in contrast to the reforms of the Reagan years, would it lop off several million of the lowest-earning taxpayers from the rolls altogether. Instead, the credit would provide taxpay-

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ing—that is to say, non-poor—families with funds that many social conservatives were privately saying could be used to help finance parochial-school tuitions, a goal that could not be achieved directly because of constitutional restrictions on such use of federal funds.

The insistence on the child tax credit by social conservatives—in effect, a reward for the support they had given the Republican revolution in the 1994 elections—made budget balancing more difficult, and forced deeper cuts in many programs than would otherwise have been required. And it subjected the Republicans to the charge that they were not so much interested in reforming Medicare and Medicaid in order to save them from impending insolvency as they were bent on cutting programs that benefited the poor, or the elderly, or needy students, in order to fund a tax cut for the middle class and the rich. In paying their debt to the social conservatives, the Republicans gave a hostage to fortune. They also created an opening for the President, who was able both to assert that he would never balance the budget "on the backs" of the poor and, in the end, to coopt the issue at a fraction of the cost by proposing a child tax credit of his own, which applies to so few families that it is not a budget-buster.

THERE IS more. It was one thing for a William J. Bennett, in his role as a concerned private citizen, to launch a campaign against gangsta rap. It was another thing for Bob Dole to piggyback on Bennett's initiative and warn movie and television producers, over whom he has substantial power, that he, too, was displeased with their output. Bill Clinton, going Dole one better, took the occasion of his State of the Union address to summon the creators of the nation's child-entertainment products to the White House, to see how the government might guide them in their artistic endeavors.

Bennett was relying both on moral suasion and on the free market in goods and stock-market shares—even Time Warner's famously obtuse executives could see that continuing to produce this music would not only become a source of personal embarrassment at their country clubs but might result in consumer-sponsored boycotts of the company's products, loss of sponsors, and a further sell-off of Time Warner holdings by investors already battered by a series of management misjudgments. But powerful government officials, like the President and the Senate Majority Leader, can do much more than cajole and embarrass; they can decide whether cable rates shall be regulated or deregulated; whether broadcasters will have to pay to participate in the digital revolution or will be given a free ride on their existing allocations of spectrum; and who shall be allowed to enter which parts of the telecommunications business.

Government intrusion, even in a cause agreeable to social conservatives, is government intrusion, and to sponsor it is to run two risks. The first has been alluded to in studies both by Charles Murray and by Gertrude Himmelfarb, and is exemplified by our experience with the welfare system: government action drives out private action. Thanks in part to consumer preferences, as expressed at the box office and in television ratings, and thanks in part to private initiatives of the sort spearheaded by Bennett, the culture does in fact, as we have seen, show incipient signs of undergoing a shift in direction. This turn came about without government intervention. To call government into the fray now might well drive the private armies from the field, and seize defeat from the jaws of victory.

Second, government enlistment on one side of the culture war may well jeopardize Republican claims to be the party that will get government off the backs of the people—a theme, if polls are to be believed, which is as popular as ever with the electorate. According to Fred Barnes, writing in the *Weekly Standard*, 64 percent of Americans say that big government is a greater threat to the country than big labor or big business, 62 percent think the government is doing too much, and 47 percent say the Republicans have not gone far enough in cutting government down to size.

Of course, when it comes to an industry that engenders as little sympathy and is so monolithically liberal as Hollywood, even pure economic conservatives may be willing to make an exception to their general distrust of big government. And it would be foolish to contend that political leaders should be prohibited from commenting on an issue—the moral tone of the nation—that is of such deep concern to the electorate. But there is a line, however hazy and indistinct, between the proper use of high office as a bully pulpit and putting pressure on a highly regulated industry to conform to a government official's notion of what separates the acceptable from the unacceptable; Dole and Clinton may have crossed it. After all, a government that interferes in the cultural life of the nation because it disap-

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proves of the products being sold and bought can as justifiably interfere in the business life of the nation by ordering manufacturers to produce cars fueled by electric batteries, even if motorists prefer the lower cost and superior performance of gasoline-powered vehicles; and so on.

Nor is this by any means the sole area of conflict within the uneasy coalition that makes up the ranks of the Republican revolution. Newt Gingrich has already incurred the wrath of social conservatives by opposing their plan to place government controls on the Internet, in the hope of eliminating material they find objectionable. On the deeply agitated issue of abortion, a bright line of principle divides, say, the editors of *National Review* and Ralph Reed's Christian Coalition from other conservatives, including Bob Dole, who seem to be wavering in their support of a constitutional amendment to ban all abortions. Another line separates Pat Buchanan and a number of other conservatives from those who, on economic grounds, favor a broadly welcoming policy on immigration. And, needless to say, the question of the place of religion in the "public square," and in the public schools, elicits no less impassioned and no less antagonistic views.

I do not mean to exaggerate. By and large, the crafters of the Republican coalition are acutely aware of their interdependence, and of the dangers to their respective programs of turning their guns on one another. Although social and economic conservatives may disagree on the specifics of tax policy, both share a desire for lower taxes. (Economic conservatives would reduce those that retard economic growth, social conservatives those that discourage the traditional family.) And both would prefer to achieve this goal by cutting entitlements rather than by swelling the deficit, which they would like to see eliminated. Then, too, although they may disagree on prayer in the schools and abortion, both groups come together on other important aspects of social policy, favoring workfare over welfare, more severe punishment of career criminals, and an end to those programs that encourage illegitimacy.

But the need to concentrate on areas of agreement—and on differences with liberals and Democrats—is very great, and all the greater if the Republicans are to build public support for the major goals of their revolution. Because a good part of the spending cuts that have been agreed to by the President and the Congress are "back-ended"—that is, they will fall into place only as we approach the target date of 2002—the consensus the Republicans have formed in the country will have to hold for a goodly length of time. Already there are signs of public discontent, as manifested in the precipitous decline in Newt Gingrich's popularity. Only if voters begin to see some benefits—lower taxes, lower interest rates, more and better jobs—are they likely to support the crucial cuts that are yet to come. And only if the two wings of the Republican coalition hold together are those benefits likely to be realized.

If the revolution's troops fail to march together, they may well lose their majorities in the House and Senate, and theirs may prove to have been a short-lived blip in a trend toward ever-bigger government. Instead of the enduring Republican revolution now in prospect, we would be left at best with the status quo, at worst with the New Deal *redux*. That would be an exceedingly high price to pay for disunity in a movement that set out so smartly and so bravely to bring us fiscal sanity and smaller government, a devolution of power, and a re-moralized America.

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Against Homosexual Marriage

James Q. Wilson

OUR COURTS, which have mishandled abortion, may be on the verge of mishandling homosexuality. As a consequence of two pending decisions, we may be about to accept homosexual marriage.

In 1993 the supreme court of Hawaii ruled that, under the equal-protection clause of that state's constitution, any law based on distinctions of sex was suspect, and thus subject to strict judicial scrutiny.* Accordingly, it reversed the denial of a marriage permit to a same-sex couple, unless the state could first demonstrate a "compelling state interest" that would justify limiting marriages to men and women. A new trial is set for early this summer. But in the meantime, the executive branch of Hawaii appointed a commission to examine the question of same-sex marriages; its report, by a vote of five to two, supports them. The legislature, for its part, holds a different view of the matter, having responded to the court's decision by passing a law unambiguously reaffirming the limitation of marriage to male-female couples.

No one knows what will happen in the coming trial, but the odds are that the Hawaiian version of the equal-rights amendment may control the outcome. If so, since the United States Constitution has a clause requiring that "full faith and credit shall be given to the public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of every other state," a homosexual couple in a state like Texas, where the population is overwhelmingly opposed to such unions, may soon be able to fly to Hawaii, get married, and then return to live in Texas as lawfully wedded. A few scholars believe that states may be able to impose public-policy objections to such out-of-state marriages—Utah has already voted one in, and other states may follow—but only at the price of endless litigation.

That litigation may be powerfully affected by the second case. It concerns a Colorado statute, already struck down by that state's supreme court, that would prohibit giving to homosexuals "any claim of minority status, quota preferences, protected status, or claim of discrimination." The U.S. Supreme Court is now reviewing the appeals. If its decision upholds the Colorado supreme court and thus allows homosexuals to acquire a constitutionally protected status, the chances will decline of successful objections to homosexual marriage based on considerations of public policy.

Contemporaneous with these events, an important book has appeared under the title *Virtually Normal*.† In it, Andrew Sullivan, the ed-

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* *Baehr, et al.*, v. *Levin*, 852 P.2d 44.

† Knopf, 209 pp., $22.00.

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itor of the *New Republic*, makes a strong case for a new policy toward homosexuals. He argues that "all *public* (as opposed to private) discrimination against homosexuals be ended. . . . *And that is all.*" The two key areas where this change is necessary are the military and marriage law. Lifting bans in those areas, while also disallowing antisodomy laws and providing information about homosexuality in publicly supported schools, would put an end to the harm that gays have endured. Beyond these changes, Sullivan writes, American society would need no "cures [of homophobia] or reeducations, no wrenching private litigation, no political imposition of tolerance."

It is hard to imagine how Sullivan's proposals would, in fact, end efforts to change private behavior toward homosexuals, or why the next, inevitable, step would not involve attempts to accomplish just that purpose by using cures and reeducations, private litigation, and the political imposition of tolerance. But apart from this, Sullivan—an English Catholic, a homosexual, and someone who has on occasion referred to himself as a conservative—has given us the most sensible and coherent view of a program to put homosexuals and heterosexuals on the same public footing. His analysis is based on a careful reading of serious opinions and his book is written quietly, clearly, and thoughtfully. In her review of it in *First Things* (January 1996), Elizabeth Kristol asks us to try to answer the following question: what would life be like if we were not allowed to marry? To most of us, the thought is unimaginable; to Sullivan, it is the daily existence of declared homosexuals. His response is to let homosexual couples marry.

SULLIVAN RECOUNTS three main arguments concerning homosexual marriage, two against and one for. He labels them prohibitionist, conservative, and liberal. (A fourth camp, the "liberationist," which advocates abolishing all distinctions between heterosexuals and homosexuals, is also described—and scorched for its "strange confluence of political abdication and psychological violence.") I think it easier to grasp the origins of the three main arguments by referring to the principles on which they are based.

The prohibitionist argument is in fact a biblical one; the heart of it was stated by Dennis Prager in an essay in the *Public Interest* ("Homosexuality, the Bible, and Us," Summer 1993). When the first books of the Bible were written, and for a long time thereafter, heterosexual love is what seemed at risk. In many cultures—not only in Egypt or among the Canaanite tribes surrounding ancient Israel but later in Greece, Rome, and the Arab world, to say nothing of large parts of China, Japan, and elsewhere—homosexual practices were common and widely tolerated or even exalted. The Torah reversed this, making the family the central unit of life, the obligation to marry one of the first responsibilities of man, and the linkage of sex to procreation the highest standard by which to judge sexual relations. Leviticus puts the matter sharply and apparently beyond quibble:

> Thou shalt not live with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination. . . . If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

Sullivan acknowledges the power of Leviticus but deals with it by placing it in a relative context. What is the nature of this "abomination"? Is it like killing your mother or stealing a neighbor's bread, or is it more like refusing to eat shellfish or having sex during menstruation? Sullivan suggests that all of these injunctions were written on the same moral level and hence can be accepted or ignored *as a whole*. He does not fully sustain this view, and in fact a refutation of it can be found in Prager's essay. In Prager's opinion and mine, people at the time of Moses, and for centuries before him, understood that there was a fundamental difference between whom you killed and what you ate, and in all likelihood people then and for centuries earlier linked whom you could marry closer to the principles that defined life than they did to the rules that defined diets.

The New Testament contains an equally vigorous attack on homosexuality by St. Paul. Sullivan partially deflects it by noting Paul's conviction that the earth was about to end and the Second Coming was near; under these conditions, all forms of sex were suspect. But Sullivan cannot deny that Paul singled out homosexuality as deserving of special criticism. He seems to pass over this obstacle without effective retort.

Instead, he takes up a different theme, namely, that on grounds of consistency many heterosexual practices—adultery, sodomy, premarital sex,

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and divorce, among others—should be outlawed equally with homosexual acts of the same character. The difficulty with this is that it mistakes the distinction alive in most people's minds between marriage as an institution and marriage as a practice. As an institution, it deserves unqualified support; as a practice, we recognize that married people are as imperfect as anyone else. Sullivan's understanding of the prohibitionist argument suffers from his unwillingness to acknowledge this distinction.

THE SECOND argument against homosexual marriage—Sullivan's conservative category—is based on natural law as originally set forth by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and more recently restated by Hadley Arkes, John Finnis, Robert George, Harry V. Jaffa, and others. How it is phrased varies a bit, but in general its advocates support a position like the following: man cannot live without the care and support of other people; natural law is the distillation of what thoughtful people have learned about the conditions of that care. The first thing they have learned is the supreme importance of marriage, for without it the newborn infant is unlikely to survive or, if he survives, to prosper. The necessary conditions of a decent family life are the acknowledgment by its members that a man will not sleep with his daughter or a woman with her son and that neither will openly choose sex outside marriage.

Now, some of these conditions are violated, but there is a penalty in each case that is supported by the moral convictions of almost all who witness the violation. On simple utilitarian grounds it may be hard to object to incest or adultery; if both parties to such an act welcome it and if it is secret, what differences does it make? But very few people, and then only ones among the overeducated, seem to care much about mounting a utilitarian assault on the family. To this assault, natural-law theorists respond much as would the average citizen—never mind "utility," what counts is what is right. In particular, homosexual uses of the reproductive organs violate the condition that sex serve solely as the basis of heterosexual marriage.

To Sullivan, what is defective about the natural-law thesis is that it assumes different purposes in heterosexual and homosexual love: moral consummation in the first case and pure utility or pleasure alone in the second. But in fact, Sullivan suggests, homosexual love can be as consummatory as heterosexual. He notes that as the Roman Catholic Church has deepened its understanding of the involuntary—that is, in some sense genetic—basis of homosexuality, it has attempted to keep homosexuals in the church as objects of affection and nurture, while banning homosexual acts as perverse.

But this, though better than nothing, will not work, Sullivan writes. To show why, he adduces an analogy to a sterile person. Such a person is permitted to serve in the military or enter an unproductive marriage; why not homosexuals? If homosexuals marry without procreation, they are no different (he suggests) from a sterile man or woman who marries without hope of procreation. Yet people, I think, want the form observed even when the practice varies; a sterile marriage, whether from choice or necessity, remains a marriage of a man and a woman. To this Sullivan offers essentially an aesthetic response. Just as albinos remind us of the brilliance of color and genius teaches us about moderation, homosexuals are a "natural foil" to the heterosexual union, "a variation that does not eclipse the theme." Moreover, the threat posed by the foil to the theme is slight as compared to the threats posed by adultery, divorce, and prostitution. To be consistent, Sullivan once again reminds us, society would have to ban adulterers from the military as it now bans confessed homosexuals.

But again this misses the point. It would make more sense to ask why an alternative to marriage should be invented and praised when we are having enough trouble maintaining the institution at all. Suppose that gay or lesbian marriage were authorized; rather than producing a "natural foil" that would "not eclipse the theme," I suspect such a move would call even more seriously into question the role of marriage at a time when the threats to it, ranging from single-parent families to common divorces, have hit record highs. Kenneth Minogue recently wrote of Sullivan's book that support for homosexual marriage would strike most people as "mere parody," one that could further weaken an already strained institution.

To me, the chief limitation of Sullivan's view is that it presupposes that marriage would have the same, domesticating, effect on homosexual members as it has on heterosexuals, while leaving the latter largely unaffected. Those are very large assumptions that no modern society has ever tested.

Nor does it seem plausible to me that a mod-

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ern society resists homosexual marriages entirely out of irrational prejudice. Marriage is a union, sacred to most, that unites a man and woman together for life. It is a sacrament of the Catholic Church and central to every other faith. Is it out of misinformation that every modern society has embraced this view and rejected the alternative? Societies differ greatly in their attitude toward the income people may have, the relations among their various races, and the distribution of political power. But they differ scarcely at all over the distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual couples. The former are overwhelmingly preferred over the latter. The reason, I believe, is that these distinctions involve the nature of marriage and thus the very meaning—even more, the very possibility—of society.

THE FINAL argument over homosexual marriage is the liberal one, based on civil rights.

As we have seen, the Hawaiian supreme court ruled that any state-imposed sexual distinction would have to meet the test of strict scrutiny, a term used by the U.S. Supreme Court only for racial and similar classifications. In doing this, the Hawaiian court distanced itself from every other state court decision—there are several—in this area so far.* A variant of the suspect-class argument, though, has been suggested by some scholars who contend that denying access to a marriage license by two people of the same sex is no different from denying access to two people of different sexes but also different races. The Hawaiian Supreme Court embraced this argument as well, explicitly comparing its decision to that of the U.S. Supreme Court when it overturned state laws banning marriages involving miscegenation.

But the comparison with black-white marriages is itself suspect. Beginning around 1964, and no doubt powerfully affected by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of that year, public attitudes toward race began to change dramatically. Even allowing for exaggerated statements to pollsters, there is little doubt that people in fact acquired a new view of blacks. Not so with homosexuals. Though the campaign to aid them has been going on vigorously for about a quarter of a century, it has produced few, if any, gains in public acceptance, and the greatest resistance, I think, has been with respect to homosexual marriages.

Consider the difference. What has been at issue in race relations is not marriage among blacks (for over a century, that right has been universally granted) or even miscegenation (long before the civil-rights movement, many Southern states had repealed such laws). Rather, it has been the routine contact between the races in schools, jobs, and neighborhoods. Our own history, in other words, has long made it clear that marriage is a different issue from the issue of social integration.

There is another way, too, in which the comparison with race is less than helpful, as Sullivan himself points out. Thanks to the changes in public attitudes I mentioned a moment ago, gradually race was held to be not central to decisions about hiring, firing, promoting, and schooling, and blacks began to make extraordinary advances in society. But then, in an effort to enforce this new view, liberals came to embrace affirmative action, a policy that said that race *was* central to just such issues, in order to ensure that *real* mixing occurred. This move created a crisis, for liberalism had always been based on the proposition that a liberal political system should encourage, as John Stuart Mill put it, "experiments in living" free of religious or political direction. To contemporary liberals, however, being neutral about race was tantamount to being neutral about a set of human preferences that in such matters as neighborhood and schooling left groups largely (but not entirely) separate.

Sullivan, who wisely sees that hardly anybody is really prepared to ignore a political opportunity to change lives, is not disposed to have much of this either in the area of race or in that of sex. And he points out with great clarity that popular attitudes toward sexuality are anyway quite different from those about race, as is evident from the fact that wherever sexual orientation is subject to local regulations, such regulations are rarely invoked. Why? Because homosexuals can "pass" or not, as they wish; they can and do accumulate education and wealth; they exercise political power. The two things a homosexual cannot

*Minnesota refused a claim for a marriage license by two gay men even though the relevant state statute does not mention sex; the federal Ninth Circuit rejected a claim that Congress, in defining a spouse in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1982, meant to include same-sex spouses. In Pennsylvania a court refused to allow a same-sex couple to contract a common-law marriage. A Kentucky court did the same in the case of two lesbians applying for a marriage license, as did a Washington court in the case of two gay men. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals acted similarly (by a divided vote) in 1995.

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do are join the military as an avowed homosexual or marry another homosexual.

The result, Sullivan asserts, is a wrenching paradox. On the one hand, society has historically tolerated the brutalization inflicted on people because of the color of their skin, but freely allowed them to marry; on the other hand, it has given equal opportunity to homosexuals, while denying them the right to marry. This, indeed, is where Sullivan draws the line. A black or Hispanic child, if heterosexual, has many friends, he writes, but a gay child "generally has no one." And that is why the social stigma attached to homosexuality is different from that attached to race or ethnicity—"because it attacks the very heart of what makes a human being human: the ability to love and be loved." Here is the essence of Sullivan's case. It is a powerful one, even if (as I suspect) his pro-marriage sentiments are not shared by all homosexuals.

LET US assume for the moment that a chance to live openly and legally with another homosexual is desirable. To believe that, we must set aside biblical injunctions, a difficult matter in a profoundly religious nation. But suppose we manage the diversion, perhaps on the grounds that if most Americans skip church, they can as readily avoid other errors of (possibly) equal magnitude. Then we must ask on what terms the union shall be arranged. There are two alternatives—marriage or domestic partnership.

Sullivan acknowledges the choice, but disparages the domestic-partnership laws that have evolved in some foreign countries and in some American localities. His reasons, essentially conservative ones, are that domestic partnerships are too easily formed and too easily broken. Only real marriages matter. But—aside from the fact that marriage is in serious decline, and that only slightly more than half of all marriages performed in the United States this year will be between never-before-married heterosexuals—what is distinctive about marriage is that it is an institution created to sustain child-rearing. Whatever losses it has suffered in *this* respect, its function remains what it has always been.

The role of raising children is entrusted in principle to married heterosexual couples because after much experimentation—several thousand years, more or less—we have found nothing else that works as well. Neither a gay nor a lesbian couple can of its own resources produce a child; another party must be involved. What do we call this third party? A friend? A sperm or egg bank? An anonymous donor? There is no settled language for even describing, much less approving of, such persons.

Suppose we allowed homosexual couples to raise children who were created out of a prior heterosexual union or adopted from someone else's heterosexual contact. What would we think of this? There is very little research on the matter. Charlotte Patterson's famous essay, "Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents" (*Journal of Child Development*, 1992), begins by conceding that the existing studies focus on children born into a heterosexual union that ended in divorce or that was transformed when the mother or father "came out" as a homosexual. Hardly any research has been done on children acquired at the outset by a homosexual couple. We therefore have no way of knowing how they would behave. And even if we had such studies, they might tell us rather little unless they were conducted over a very long period of time.

But it is one thing to be born into an apparently heterosexual family and then many years later to learn that one of your parents is homosexual. It is quite another to be acquired as an infant from an adoption agency or a parent-for-hire and learn from the first years of life that you are, because of your family's position, radically different from almost all other children you will meet. No one can now say how grievous this would be. We know that young children tease one another unmercifully; adding this dimension does not seem to be a step in the right direction.

Of course, homosexual "families," with or without children, might be rather few in number. Just how few, it is hard to say. Perhaps Sullivan himself would marry, but, given the great tendency of homosexual males to be promiscuous, many more like him would not, or if they did, would not marry with as much seriousness.

That is problematic in itself. At one point, Sullivan suggests that most homosexuals would enter a marriage "with as much (if not more) commitment as heterosexuals." Toward the end of his book, however, he seems to withdraw from so optimistic a view. He admits that the label "virtually" in the title of his book is deliberately ambiguous, because homosexuals as a group are *not* "normal." At another point, he writes that the "openness of the contract" between two homosexual males means that such a union will in fact be more durable than a heterosexual marriage because the contract contains an "*understanding*

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of the need for extramarital outlets" (emphasis added). But no such "understanding" exists in heterosexual marriage; to suggest that it might in homosexual ones is tantamount to saying that we are now referring to two different kinds of arrangements. To justify this difference, perhaps, Sullivan adds that the very "lack of children" will give "gay couples greater freedom." Freedom for what? Freedom, I think, to do more of those things that heterosexual couples do less of because they might hurt the children.

THE COURTS in Hawaii and in the nation's capital must struggle with all these issues under the added encumbrance of a contemporary outlook that makes law the search for rights, and responsibility the recognition of rights. Indeed, thinking of laws about marriage as documents that confer or withhold rights is itself an error of fundamental importance—one that the highest court in Hawaii has already committed. "Marriage," it wrote, "is a state-conferred legal-partnership status, the existence of which gives rise to a multiplicity of rights and benefits. . . ." A state-conferred legal partnership? To lawyers, perhaps; to mankind, I think not. The Hawaiian court has thus set itself on the same course of action as the misguided Supreme Court in 1973 when it thought that laws about abortion were merely an assertion of the rights of a living mother and an unborn fetus.

I have few favorable things to say about the political systems of other modern nations, but on these fundamental matters—abortion, marriage, military service—they often do better by allowing legislatures to operate than we do by deferring to courts. Our challenge is to find a way of formulating a policy with respect to homosexual unions that is not the result of a reflexive act of judicial rights-conferring, but is instead a considered expression of the moral convictions of a people.

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The Lovemaking of I.B. Singer
A Story

Norma Rosen

When I was young I was sent among the old, to teach them. The job paid a small stipend, in return for which I had only to hearten a few old people for a limited time by getting them to write something down.

The first day, I arrived at the Center by bus, put my foot into a hole in the asphalt just below the curb, wrenched my ankle, and limped the rest of the way to the classroom. The pain of bad timing hurt worse than the ankle. Not only would I wobble and wince before my class, I felt psychologically impeded as well. How could I flee all the things I wanted to run from? Among them, my father's pitiful request, "Don't be beholden like me! Make yourself strong, independent!" He meant from others; I understood: from him.

I hobbled to a round table in a large, bare room where six old people sat. When they turned toward me, their bifocals made their heads bob and jerk like birds, pecking at sight. "Here, use this!" Everyone had a cane to offer. Curved wooden cane-handles hung from the rim of the table. They peered over the top like blond- or brown-haired younger selves.

When I saw my students, I took fright. Old! Some older kind of old with ancient roots in Europe. Modern life didn't yield it any longer. Neither my mother nor my burdened father looked like them.

"Look how young she is!" a woman called to someone across the table.

Fine with me. I had pulled my long hair into a single spine-cleaving braid, and wore a bright-colored, schoolgirl jumper. I wanted to be a young writer with no responsibilities. Wanted to put off, forever if possible, the task my father set me.

I had brought one of my own stories, and read it aloud. Then I told my class the events on which I based the story, pointing out where I changed, added, or omitted elements.

"You mean lying?" several of the old people asked. "You *lied*?"

I said I was pleased to have deceived them. I had practiced an important writing skill, creative lying. They, I said, had practiced the willing suspension of disbelief.

I did not confess that I had also altered the real events my story drew on, making myself more certain and decisive. I didn't admit, for example, that I still lived with my family, or that we fought constantly about my future.

I said that I looked forward to reading what the class wrote. Three students hobbled up.

"My eyes are so bad, you shouldn't know from it," said one named Boris. "My fingers," said another whose name was Yetta. "Look, sweetheart, how stiff!" The third, Max, mutely peered at me through milky cataracts.

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How could I expect writing from them? But they had stories to tell, they said, that would make my fortune if I wrote everything down while they dictated. Didn't I want to? Boris, whose deformed hands could hardly grasp his cane, let alone a pencil, said he had memorized at least ten pages of his autobiography, and required only someone—he stared at me meaningfully—to put the whole thing into shape. Then it, too, could make a fortune. "We'll share, we'll share," he assured me.

"WHAT DO you make?" Max asked.

If this had been my father asking I'd have replied, "Art." But not to Max.

"I can't give an exact amount. I do quite well." This lie was to bolster my already crippled standing. I thought of a scene from *The Odyssey*. Odysseus goes down to the underworld, and the dead, including his own mother, clamor about him for a drink of blood.

A woman named Bella stayed behind to speak to me. Her hair was carefully waved, touched with streaks of blond, her eyes round and blue. She was not one of the shapeless old, but kept waist, hips, and bosom defined, clothed in a blue dress with a low, square neckline.

"I am desperate!" She bent over me. The square of flesh showed the crease between her breasts and many smaller creases. "My father sinks deeper into his grave every year! Every piece of paper he left is precious to me. I could never leave out anything. But you will, please God!"

"I? I will?"

"Yes, you'll write about my father, the wonderful father I betrayed!"

Her words made me shudder. She had betrayed her father and I was planning to betray mine. She saw that I was about to blurt out a refusal, and quickly went on, "You must know the work of the writer, I. B. Singer?"

"Yes, yes!" I was relieved to be away from whatever request Bella was making about the papers her father left. I was at that time reading Singer's work with equal amounts of interest and uneasiness. The Jews in Singer's stories in no way resembled my family, where no one spoke Yiddish, or read Hebrew, or told mystical tales, or practiced anything remotely resembling the kind of religious observance Singer wrote about. If he was a Jewish writer, what was I? What was to be the source of my writing material? Was it only what I counseled my students to draw on—love, hate, anger, disappointment, rage, joy? Nothing wrong with such themes, but what if they proved little more than outlines whose spaces I had trouble filling in? And what should I call my characters? Weintraub or Hopkins? I searched the telephone book for neutrality. White. Black. Brown. Green.

Such questions were already a betrayal of my father. I was further betraying him by hurling myself back to the hand-to-mouth existence from which he had so laboriously extricated himself. My father longed for me to achieve parity with the people who tormented him in his small dress-manufacturing business: he wanted me to become a buyer in a department store, with a power to match that of his enemies. My mother urged safe marriage, or at worst a teaching degree, away from the rough types in merchandising. Jonas, my boyfriend, longed to tramp through wilderness.

Surely life had more choices to offer than the few I already knew about? I was glad of this job, teaching the old people, so that I could put off my decisions with only a little extra lying.

"Hiking?" my parents said. "You want to go hiking with Jonas? What for? A person takes a walk. Who needs a sleeping bag?"

I had to say that a large group was going, not just Jonas. Males and females, yes, but with women guides as chaperones. We would stay overnight at inns, properly separated by sex. The sleeping bags were for resting on the hikes; not sleeping bags, resting bags—why were they calling them sleeping bags?

"I'll tell you a story." Bella stood before me in her flirtatious blue dress. "It's really I.B. Singer's story, but all right, I'll give it to you! Keep the profits. I only want my father's spirit to be at peace at last." When she was done telling me Singer's story, she said, I would see why I must come home with her and look into a trunk full of her father's manuscripts—letters, journals, sketches, and hundreds of pages of notes, of untold value to the history of Yiddish theater and literature in America.

I saw myself plundering a trunk stuffed with the authentic Jewish past. I would publish, reclaim, and at the same time transform myself into a writer through whom Jewish rivers ran so deep that no matter how much I siphoned off into scribbles, they would never run dry. I would drink them, the way the dead of Odysseus' underworld drank the offering of blood.

I pictured I.B. Singer himself, looking frail and alert, as if a wind could blow him anywhere and he would let it, to see, out of his great curiosity and openness to chance, out of his cunning passivity and his belief in the unity of life, just where it would blow him.

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The next moment I pictured a tangle of papers, a writer's nightmare, that would take years to sort and order and write about and then—what about my own work? What about my life? How should I weigh them against my father's dream of revenge through me?

I suggested to Bella that what was in her father's trunk, or some part of it, would make a project for this class. Bella could write about it herself. I'd be glad to help with that. Or she could write a letter to a publisher—I could help with that, too—and the publisher might find someone who could assist her with the contents.

"I'm not the person to do this, Bella. I don't know anything about it."

"What's to know? Your heart knows. And every scrap I'll translate for you!"

NO, NO, I protested, she didn't realize how little I knew of the background. Absolutely nothing. I had to lie about my grandparents having spoken Yiddish, occasionally tossing a phrase to me. I added more sentences meant to remove me further from Bella's suggestion without wounding her.

My answer made Bella more insistent. "I see I haven't made you understand yet what is at stake there, all these years!"

No one had come in to use the room. A large window looked out onto rushing highway traffic, and I had a sense of decades streaking by, as in a speeded-up home movie.

"I'll tell you what happened with Mr. I.B. Singer, and why I can't rest until I make up for my terrible sin! I left my father's life in the trunk!"

The way she put it made me shudder again. I thought of the woman nailed alive in her coffin in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." I thought of my father's life, imprisoned by those to whom he was beholden for his livelihood. Mostly, I was impatient to hear about Singer.

When Bella sat down again at the table, I followed her. Her blue eyes shone, and she hugged herself with excitement as she began.

"I was a young mother, my breasts full of milk! I always had to run home from wherever I was to nurse the baby before I wet myself. My life was full—full! Can you understand? My breasts full of milk, my arms full of babies, my home bursting with life and conflicts, and lovemaking to soothe it all over. And I also had a trunk full of my father's letters, diaries, poems, plays he started and never finished. It weighed on me. I vowed to free my dead father's words from the trunk.

"In those days I could still write Yiddish fluently. After I read a story by I.B. Singer, I wrote him a letter and sent it in care of the Yiddish newspaper where he appeared. I told him what an important man my father had been in Jewish culture, how I myself had considered becoming an actress in the Yiddish theater. I enclosed a picture."

"You asked I. B. Singer to write about your father?"

"Yes. No. I meant to. Anyway, he called me up. In the daytime, while I was home by myself with my babies. He thanked me for praising his stories and for the picture of myself. 'You have a beautiful face,' he said.

"He had such a quiet, intimate voice. I became dissatisfied with my life when he spoke. I thought, Why is it that he, a busy and successful writer, has time for everything, and I have time for nothing? Those days I was so rushed that things fell from my hands.

"'Mr. Singer,' I said, 'I have a trunk full of my father's writings. He was a great man, but history passed him by. Whatever you want to take from the trunk, you can have it. Only please write something about my father or I won't have rest.'

"'Your father?' he said. 'You sent me a picture of you, not your father.'

"'Yes, I don't understand it!' I began to cry.

"'All right,' he said, in the same calm voice, 'I will come to your house. I will look inside your trunk and I will see what I can do.'

"My tears dried. We set the date and time, during the afternoon when the babies took their naps and my husband was away at his salesman's job.

"I.B. Singer himself came to my house at the appointed time! It was pouring rain, thunder and lightning. At first I couldn't hear the doorbell ring. I went to answer with one baby on my hip, and the other one under my arm, like a loaf of bread.

"'Mr. Singer,' I said, 'come in. In a few minutes my babies will be sound asleep in their cribs. Then we can open the trunk. It's full of treasures.'

"He had brought me a bunch of flowers. I told him to look around and find a glass to put them in. He sat in the living room and waited for me. There were toys on the floor, clean diapers that I was folding on the couch, half-finished baby bottles of water and juice on the tables, also teething rings and bits of wet zwieback. When the pieces get small you have to take them away from babies, or they'll choke, this is good for you to know.

"He sat patiently, this great man, till I was finished. When I came back into the living room he

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rose to face me and we fell into each other's arms. He spoke love-words in Yiddish, I in Czech, my mother's language. The sounds we made were thick and tangled, like the papers in my father's trunk, treasures we had no time to decipher. And this," said Bella, "was how I betrayed my father."

As soon as Bella said that, I thought again of how I was betraying *my* father.

"Christmas, I send the Altman's buyer an alligator pocket book," my father said. "Big, a big one! 'Merry Christmas to my good friend Marge,' I write in the note, 'from your good friend Sol.'

"And she sends it back. With a note. 'I think you forgot something.' And signs, Marjorie Kennedy."

"What? What did you forget, Daddy?"

"That's what I thought, what did I forget? How to spell her name, what? It took your mother to figure it out. I was supposed to put in money." His eyes watered a little as he looked at me. I could see the insult stung.

"Oh, no!" I was indignant.

"I put in a few big bills and sent it back and that was it. She kept it and never said thank you. Maybe she thought I didn't put in enough."

My father and mother weren't outraged, that was what bothered me. They were bitter but accepting. Most buyers were Gentiles, who had the power, they said, to turn away Jews.

"You should have reported her!" I shouted. "You should have gone to the president of the department store and reported her!"

My parents exchanged a silent look. Like the oldness of my students, their fears seemed too ancient for America.

"MY BABIES began to make sounds," Bella went on. "'Soon,' I said, 'I will have to run in and begin to do things,' my hands flying around.

"'In that case I will leave now,' Mr. Singer said. It was still raining when I opened the door for him to go. Afterward, I went into the room where my children lay in their cribs. I had pasted paper ducks on the wall above their heads. The babies began to coo at me and I cooed back at them. With my children, also, I spoke a special language. It wasn't Czech and it wasn't Yiddish. It wasn't English, either. It was a language made for babies and their mother.

"While I was having this beautiful, loving conversation with my children, I heard another voice. It was very angry.

"'Wicked woman!' the voice said. 'You have betrayed me!' It was the voice of my father, buried with his papers inside the trunk I had forgotten when I.B. Singer was in my house!" Her hands moved remorsefully about her face. She touched her brow, her cheeks, in sorrow.

The door opened. A volunteer called out, "We have to set up card tables in here now!"

"Next week," Bella said to me, "I will finish the story."

In the week that followed, I was berated by both my parents for my bad decisions, and by Jonas for indecisiveness.

"The Northwest!" my mother cried. "What's in the Northwest? Nothing is there!" I rose up in wrath to mention people, landscapes, cities, and farms. Yet I knew very well what "nothing" meant. Nothing for me, nothing for a Jewish girl. Where had that groundless idea sprung from, that idea based on zero Jewish content in our lives, ready to drown us in regret?

When I came to the Center the next week, my place at the table was piled high with manuscripts everyone but Bella had written. Despite my fear that such old fingers might not be able to hold pens, their offerings averaged many pages each, and some had notes attached: "I haven't written the half of it!"

All during class I could feel Bella's eyes on me. She was bursting to go on with her story, and I was bursting to hear it. Meanwhile, I read aloud a paragraph or two from each of the papers that had been handed in, praising choice of subject matter. There were feuds with long-dead relatives, childhood sorrows, first loves. I planned to read everyone's work at home and confer privately with each student. For now, in open class, I thought I should keep papers anonymous. But as I came to each one the writer cried out, "That's mine, I wrote it!"

At the end of the class Bella again approached me after other students had left. She was again wearing her blue dress, and when she bent over, a soft folding and unfolding was at play within its low-cut square. She was doing something to her cane—lifting it by the crook instead of leaning on it—that made her look as if she might be thinking of starting a soft-shoe routine.

"That story I told you last week—I have imagined it so often that sometimes I no longer remember that it never happened."

"What!" I cried.

"What can I tell you, young teacher, young writer? I don't understand it myself. Somehow I forgot. This important thing that I desired with

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all my heart and soul—I forgot it. I had to go out for some reason, again the terrible busyness of my days took hold of me, I jumped from one thing to another, and just at the time that Isaac Bashevis Singer was supposed to come to my house I was not there. I forgot about it and I didn't remember again for twenty years!"

"He was *supposed* to come, he *did* come? And you weren't *there*? Bella, what happened?"

"One day I was looking at the newspaper and I saw his picture, he was winning prizes, a famous writer, and I thought, 'Oh, my poor father in the trunk!'

"So I called him up again. Such a modest man, he was still at the same number. 'Mr. Singer,' I said, 'congratulations on your prizes. Do you remember receiving a letter years ago from a woman who enclosed her picture, and when you called she told you her father had left a trunk full of papers? Mr. Singer, I am that woman! I beg you, Mr. Singer, again, to come and rescue my father's papers.'"

"Bella," I said, "do you mean what you're saying this time?"

"That is exactly what I.B. Singer said. 'Do you mean it this time?'"

"'Twenty years ago, Mr. Singer,' I said, 'you agreed to come to my house. I often think of you standing before my door, ringing the bell, waiting for me to open and let you in. You thought I had a beautiful face. Maybe you were carrying roses for me. You waited before the door. Then you left. Forgive me, Mr. Singer. I am not distracted now. My children are gone from home, my busy hands are idle. My father's manuscripts cry out to me from the trunk where they are still buried. For the second time I ask you to pick whatever you like from the trunk, and write about my father. Now I'm ready.'

"There was a silence at first. I heard rustling sounds, like papers being moved around on a desk.

"'*Now* you're ready?' he said. 'My dear lady, whoever you are, I am sorry to tell you this. Now I am too busy.'"

"Bella!" I cried. "Did he say that or didn't he? Did he come after that or not?"

"Don't you think I ask myself the same questions? I torture myself with trying to remember. It's as if everything connected with the trunk gets pulled inside and locked up with my father's papers. I no longer remember what really happened! All I know is that my father's papers are still in the trunk!"

She stared at me intensely. "Why can't you rescue my father's papers? Every scrap I will translate for you. You only have to write words about it. You're young, it will make your reputation. Think of what I.B. Singer said to me, 'Before, I was ready and you were not ready. Now you are ready, but I am not ready.'"

Bella seized me in her arms and pressed me against her heaving bosom. "Can't you imagine how every day those words tear my heart?"

I was no longer trying to imagine anything. I was trying to extricate myself from Bella's embrace, so full of the Yiddish passion I thought I wanted to ground my writing in, and so terrifying in the flesh.

Her eyes filled with tears. I felt my own welling up. Between us was the trunk in which her father lay in pieces. I could almost see it. Old, leather- and metal-bound, peeling and rotting.

"Can't I beg you?" she asked, her voice breaking.

DURING THE next year, my grant expired along with my little stipend and the only thing I had to fall back on was my hand-to-mouth existence, which I stubbornly clung to. Jonas tired of my wavering and moved to the Northwest without me. I had let go by the registration date for my something-to-fall-back-on teaching degree. My father no longer spoke to me of his dream of parity and went about with his shoulders drooping more than ever.

Toward the end, the fiscal end, of that year, my father, having failed too often to please the department-store buyers, lost his sales outlets, went bankrupt, and shot himself with a gun my Uncle Maury, my mother's brother who lived with us, had brought home from World War II and kept loaded in a closet for years. My father had not intended to kill himself. He had come upon it one day in his unaccustomed idleness, accidentally shot himself in the foot, and died of infection.

Having urged me for years to avoid my father's business, my mother in despair now flew at me and told me I had as good as murdered him with disappointment. "Look what you did with your stubbornness!" My older brother, who had been in business with my father, tried to reason with her, but in the end I felt he too was giving me embittered looks. What could it have been but stubbornness, in the midst of our horror and grief, that made me stay with the impractical, the risky, and not set out on the long training to make myself a buyer and thus the avenger of my father's death?

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I called the Center. Bella's father's trunk was in my mind. The number was disconnected. Had they all died? I traveled uptown to where the Center had been and saw for myself that the space on the ground floor of the apartment building was now converted to stores. I stared at the cut-rate housewares in one window and the discount pharmaceutical items in another, and thought with regret of that little class of men and women, as lost to me now as my lost father. I heard those fateful phrases again—"Before, you were not ready; now, I am not ready"—and I felt terror.

One day my life, too, would be inscribed between those baleful polar alternatives. I was already inscribed! I gazed at the assortment of canes and crutches piled up in the pharmacy window, waiting for the newly infirm, and my spirits sank and sank.

SUDDENLY MY brain, like some Lilliputian trying to hoist my heaviness with pygmy word-chains, restored the last piece of Bella's story, until then blocked from memory.

One day after class, Bella again telling me how a visit from I.B. Singer made her forget her father, how she herself forgot which parts of the story were true and which not, I looked deep into Bella's grandmotherly eyes, lit with such heat that I drew back. My God, I thought, the power of love, of sex, of imagination, of body, spirit, whatever it is—wonderful, terrible.... I thought: what if Bella's visit with I.B. Singer neither happened nor failed to happen? What if Bella was making it *all* up, writing it, there before my eyes? An A student!

"Bella," I asked, "is this your creative-writing project?"

She had the soft, round cheeks of age, and they dimpled. Without saying yes or no, she curled her hair behind one of her ears with a forefinger. "So you think I'm that good?" she laughed.

Now I reheard clearly what, in my anxiety at being called on to rescue Bella's father, I had failed to retain. Bella admitted that she might have made up the story of I.B. Singer. She didn't say she had, but she might have, diverting herself in the same way that she wore the flirtatious blue dress.

As soon as I remembered that piece of Bella's story, the canes and crutches no longer seemed to be lying in wait; they looked flung there by people able to get along without them. I set off on the path to the bus with a lightness that made me look at the signs of spring all around me. But the winged seeds of maple trees, scattered over the cement walk like torn brown paper, reminded me that Bella's father's life still lay in pieces in the trunk.

The clutch of those pincer claws! Before, you were not ready; now, I am not ready. Bella might or might not have made that up, but it sounded like I.B. Singer to me. Was that frightening maxim, already encountered at my father's death, what lay forever in wait for me?

Again, I fought for control over my fear. Chance brought me here, I thought, to Bella and her Singer story. I can learn from it. Surely we are not doomed to repeat mindlessly what we've been made aware of.

With that thought, I came to the curb and stepped into the same unmended hole I had turned my foot in the year before.

Through the sharp pain of the retwisted ankle I seemed to hear my students call, "Here, use this!" and see their upraised canes. I could hear Bella's voice richly recounting the story of her father's trunk and I.B. Singer's lovemaking. "Save my father!" she cried out to me. I felt myself grow dizzy, as if a giant hand turned me around and around.

The bus pulled up. I limped on, paid my fare, and sat among silent strangers of all ages and conditions. The road was smooth, but I tossed from side to side.

At one side was Singer's terrifying maxim of unreadiness. At the other side was the charm and gaiety of Bella's storytelling, which might or might not have invented that gloomy I.B. Singer maxim in the first place.

Finally, to calm my confusion, I silently proclaimed: "If someone like Bella *could* so imagine, *could* so divert herself with new possibilities even when old, ill, empty, idle, and full of regret, then no one's life need be constrained or bound or in the end inscribed in anything but the flamboyant book of life itself."

And for a while I even believed my own words, and I was comforted.

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Comes the Millennium

George Weigel

In New York City, the Rainbow Room atop Rockefeller Center is already booked solid for the night of December 31, 1999. In England, Her Majesty's Government has appointed a "Millennium Commission," one of whose members has endorsed a project to build a gigantic Ferris wheel looming 200 feet above Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. The editors of the *Washington Post*'s "Sunday Style" section have declared Genghis Khan the "man of the millennium." And, *mutatis* very much *mutandis*, Pope John Paul II has issued an apostolic letter, "The Coming Third Millennium," asking the Catholic Church to prepare itself for a new "springtime" of missionary activity.

It cannot be said that John Paul's letter has energized his own Church, much less the general culture. For whatever reasons—and, in the West, those reasons may well include a sense of exhaustion—the image of the "millennium year" has yet to seize the public imagination in a powerful way. But the intellectuals are stirring. One of them is Conor Cruise O'Brien, the Irish statesman and writer whose long and variegated career has taken him into the turbulent worlds of national politics (as a cabinet officer and a Labor member of the Irish Dail), international politics (as a special assistant to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld), and journalism (as editor-in-chief of the *London Observer* and current contributing editor to the *Atlantic Monthly*).

O'Brien's special interest is the relationship between democracy, understood and appreciated as a child of the secular Enlightenment, and the enduring, "pre-modern" realities of nationalism and religion, which have done so much to shape and misshape the politics of modernity. In 1994, he was invited to deliver the prestigious Massey lectures for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and those five lectures have been gathered into a book under the foreboding title, *On the Eve of the Millennium: The Future of Democracy Through an Age of Unreason*.*

The book raises a number of interesting questions. How, for example, will democracies relieve their chronic defect, the politicians' "craving for short-term popularity," in an age dominated by the culture and technology of immediate gratification? Will the pornographic voyeurism the West indulges vis-à-vis its public figures erode the legitimacy of democratic institutions over time, as it once helped delegitimate the French monarchy? If "faith in progress" is essential to democratic self-governance, can such a faith be "more tentative and more humble" while calling forth the moral commitments that democracy requires? Can

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democracy survive the "cognitive degeneration" evident in political correctness, risk-averse politicians, the trivialization of public life, and the Western cult of lugubrious introspection?

Alas, it cannot be said that O'Brien probes these questions in a satisfying way. Take his special concern with the nexus among religion, nationalism, and democracy. There is much peremptory harrumphing here about the looming dangers of "fundamentalism," but O'Brien pays no attention whatsoever to the way in which religious conviction shaped, for example, the democratic revolution that transformed the politics of Latin America, East Central Europe, and East Asia in the 1980's. Nor does he offer any insight into the roles of religion and nationalism (religiously-informed or otherwise) in the revitalization of established democracies, or in the possible transformation of the world's authoritarian, Islamic, and totalitarian states (like China, Indonesia, and Cuba). Thus a crucial question is not only left unanswered, but unasked: on the cusp of the third millennium, does the abiding political potency of religious conviction and nationalist sentiment require us to rethink our understanding of the relationship between the "Enlightenment heritage" and our political institutions and political culture?

It is also curious that, over the course of five lengthy lectures, O'Brien proffers no detailed definition of Enlightenment values or of the Enlightenment heritage he wishes to defend. He does make a useful (if unoriginal) distinction between the radical secularity of the French *philosophes* and the more benign attitude toward religion exhibited by the English and Scottish Enlightenments. But he does not pursue the question of whether this distinction reflects dramatically different attitudes toward the heritage of Western civilization. O'Brien has frequently described himself as a legatee of both Voltaire and Edmund Burke. But it is the Frenchman's radical anticlericalism that is most noticeable in O'Brien's failure to inquire whether the Enlightenment heritage might be connected in some fashion to the pre-Enlightenment history of the West. Jerusalem, Rome, the court of Charlemagne, the medieval schoolmen: none of these seems to have had very much to do with the "heritage" O'Brien wants to preserve into the third millennium. That was not, to put it gently, the view of Burke.

As with the past, so with the present: O'Brien devotes nary a single sentence to the crisis of the Enlightenment heritage embodied in contemporary Western philosophy. But here, surely, is an opportunity to examine whether one influential stream of Enlightenment thought has become self-mutilating. When democracy cannot defend its superiority on anything other than crudely utilitarian grounds, it is in serious trouble indeed. Yet that is precisely the situation into which the radical epistemological skepticism of today's academy has put us. Is it because he cannot bear to think through the responsibility for this moral *cul-de-sac* that O'Brien ignores the issue?

AVOIDING THE really hard questions, O'Brien's Massey Lectures are replete with what cigar-makers call "filler": ill-informed cracks about American presidential politics; typically dismissive liberal clichés about a somnambulant Ronald Reagan; a strange obsession with the Clinton administration's "Operation Restore Democracy" in Haiti. But O'Brien really loses his grip in the matter of Pope John Paul II, to whose purported wickedness he dedicates the first of his lectures.

O'Brien begins with a frankly apocalyptic charge: the Pope has created a "Rome-Riyadh axis" in order to unite "the religious of the world . . . for a final victory over the irreligious." As evidence for this plot to inaugurate a new Dark Age, O'Brien adduces the World Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994. There, the Vatican played a major role in defeating the plans of the Clinton administration and its allies to increase the coercive power of the state in family planning and sex education throughout the world.

For O'Brien, who openly claims to "abhor" Pope John Paul II and who admits to praying daily for his immediate demise, Cairo signified something very ominous. It seems the last half of the second millennium has been "a time of disaster for the Catholic Church." But now the Church will have its revenge: through the machinations of the Pope, official Catholicism has forged a tactical alliance with Islamic fundamentalism in order to roll back, and then rout, the Enlightenment heritage. To this end, the Pope is "not averse to giving hints" that he himself "might . . . in the year 2000, announce his acceptance of the Qu'ran and summon the faithful, through the papal *muezzin*, to join him in prayer at the Mosque of St. Peter."

Such fevered inanities, which would be dismissed as the ravings of a madman had they is-

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sued from the likes of the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart, suggest why O'Brien is a poor guide to understanding the millennium now closing, or to assaying the human and democratic prospect beyond the year 2000.

LUCKILY, THERE are other guides. Felipe Fernández-Armesto's massive study, *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years*,* asks us to consider the second millennium "from outside": from the perspective of a group of "galactic museum-keepers" living tens of thousands of years in the future.

This may seem, at first blush, a cheap device to sneak multiculturalism and its attendant deprecations in through the front door. Yet in the hands of Fernández-Armesto, a Spaniard who wrote the most balanced biography of Columbus during the recent battles over the meaning of "1492," and an Oxford don who styles himself "a committed advocate of the traditional humanist curriculum," the view from the long-range future casts light upon phenomena that are typically left in the shadows. To be sure, *Millennium* does challenges the "rise of the West" historiography of contemporary giants like William H. McNeill and J.M. Roberts. But it does so without romanticizing other cultures or indulging in Claude Rains-style protestations of shock at the foibles of great figures from the once-sacrosanct Western pantheon.

Fernández-Armesto also eschews ideological explanations (like the classic liberal analyses of Macauley or Acton) for the churnings of history. Rather, what focuses his attention is "initiative," the

> capacity of some groups decisively to influence others—and, in particular, the ability of some peoples decisively to influence the rest of mankind—by generating and communicating ideas, creating or adapting technology, and undertaking exploration, colonization, or aggression.

Natural endowments (like population or resources) and cultural accomplishments (like technology) were once the prime determinants of a civilization's relative position vis-à-vis its competitors; thus, at the beginning of our millennium, China's demographic weight and technological prowess should have suggested the Middle Kingdom would be the power likely to dominate the planet. But over the past thousand years, the conviction, will, and capacity to project one's culture *outward*—the determination to seize the historical initiative beyond one's own shores—have made the crucial difference between leaders and led, conquerors and conquered.

This, Fernández-Armesto argues, is a genuine *novum* in human affairs. No one, in the year 1000, could have imagined that the Atlantic-based nations of Latin Christianity would dominate the last three centuries of the second millennium. But by the same token, no one should assume that the civilization of the Atlantic world has an open-ended claim to be the driving force of world history. Indeed, on Fernández-Armesto's view of things, "initiative" has shifted once again, in the last quarter of the last century, to certain "technically-proficient communities of the Pacific seaboard": there, he argues, we may find the "superior morale" that is essential to world-historical leadership.

Thus the Spanish historian, who has little truck with "mega-explanations" of the past, nonetheless finds a "thread in the labyrinth": the relative position of cultures and their impact on history depends in no small part on the way peoples think about themselves and others. "History," he writes, "is scattered with the debris of empires whose people talked themselves into decline and of victories won by superior morale." It is a lesson the post-cold-war West, fraught with introspection and fretting over "imperial overstretch," would do well to ponder.

FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO'S method is, by his own admission, somewhat quirky. But it pays dividends at a variety of levels of analysis. By viewing the past thousand years from the perspective of the "galactic museum-keepers" of the future, by utilizing a "pointillist technique," and by indulging a "bias in favor of the unusual" in order to look at the conventionally important "from fresh directions," he produces a steady flow of intriguing judgments, many of which amount to reversals of the common wisdom on a whole host of historical issues and events.

For instance:

• Private enterprise, not governmental foresight, was the mainspring of the great West European empires. Moreover, the crucial "initiative" involved in Western expansion was to be found not among the scholars and artists of the Renaissance but in the cast of mind of navigators, explorers, and settlers. Their mentality, in turn, vindicated the chivalric tradition, as, going off "in search of the dénouement of their own ro-

*Scribner, 816 pp., $35.00.

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mance," they succeeded in thrusting their "small promontory of Asia" into the center of world affairs.

• The indigenous peoples with whom European explorers and settlers came into contact and conflict were not hapless victims, doomed to failure in a no-win contest between modernity and primitivism. Rather, they were "active contestants" for power during the age of expansion. Thus, the Spanish conquerors of Mexico "were not drawn into a vacuum as if by an abhorrent nature but clashed with a competing culture that was also expanding rapidly and aggressively."

• The Reformation and the Counter-Reformation were not antitheses but "two aspects of a single, powerful urge to evangelism which dominated the history of the planet during the early-modern period." Nor was early modernity a time of dramatic secularism; rather, the dynamics of Western expansion were one expression of "a civilization gripped by mission fever."

At the close of his book, Fernández-Armesto succumbs to what he describes as a "deplorably obvious temptation" and assays a brief sketch of "how the next millennium might start to grow out of the last." His forecasts fit no ready-made ideological niche. The Malthusian doomsayers and the more exuberant global democrats, he writes, will both be proved wrong: economic change and development will lower birth rates, but rival totalitarianisms will return, taking advantage of (and, in some instances, responding to) social pressures caused by the West's descent into relativism and uncertainty. Great states, including the United States, will fragment. Cities will wither, as information technology, robotics, and energy efficiency combine to reverse a longstanding civilizational trend toward urbanization. Finally, shifts in historical initiative will become more rapid, so that even the impending Pacific age may be less enduring than the moment of Atlantic hegemony now coming to a close.

ALL OF which makes for interesting conjecture. But as Fernández-Armesto readily admits, conjecture is simply that. Moreover, there are several aspects of his analysis that deserve closer scrutiny, not least for what they might suggest about the future.

Fernández-Armesto is on to something important when he argues that any shift in world-historical initiative from West to East will turn on a collapse of civilizational morale in the former. If ideas are indeed consequential, then the crisis of certainty among Western intellectuals—the conviction that certainty is itself chimerical and oppressive—could not but have deleterious effects on the West's capacity and will to maintain its initiative. A culture that cannot give a compelling account of its convictions and purposes, to itself and to its rivals, is an unlikely candidate for world leadership.

But as Fernández-Armesto admits, "reveling in pessimism" is also an occupational hazard of historians, and those of us who are not members of that guild may, in fact, be better positioned to espy some counter-indicators. Perhaps the first has to do with what might be called "unsecularization." According to several prominent tellings of the tale, modernity was supposed to result in thoroughgoing secularization. Yet two of the most culturally dynamic forces at the turn of the millennium are anything but secular.

Evangelical Protestantism, what the British sociologist David Martin has called a "third Wesleyan revolution," is sweeping through Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of East Asia, carrying in its wake decidedly Western, indeed bourgeois, values and behaviors. Those values and behaviors, in turn, are generally supportive of Western economic and political institutions. Millions of lives in the third world are being transformed by this extraordinary phenomenon, as countless thousands were once transformed in early-industrial Britain and antebellum America.

Then there is the Catholic Church, transformed from the last bastion of the *ancien régime* into perhaps the world's foremost institutional defender of basic human rights. Fernández-Armesto, considering the possible return of totalitarianism in the wake of Western *angst* and pusillanimity, finds some encouragement in the hope that the Catholic Church will maintain "what may become a unique commitment to moral absolutism in defense of human dignity, individual freedom, social justice, and the sanctity of life." But the recent Catholic accomplishment is far more than a matter of resounding "thou shalt nots." The Catholic case for human rights and democracy has been built, not over-against religious conviction, but on the foundation of religious orthodoxy. Thus, at least one path beyond the *cul-de-sac* of "uncertainty" and the consequent erosion of civilizational morale in the West has been identified. (Conor Cruise O'Brien to the contrary notwithstanding.)

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Fernández-Armesto is also curiously inattentive to the fact that expectations about the protection of certain basic human rights—understood as immunities of persons from the coercive power of the state—are virtually universal in scope at the end of the second millennium. This, too, is a genuine *novum*. The human-rights revolution of the late 20th century had a decisive impact on the collapse of European Communism and traditional Latin American *caudillism*. Human-rights claims have also deeply influenced the recent outburst of democratic politics in East Asia. If the new authoritarianism proposed by some dictators and intellectuals in that region has found little resonance in the West, by the same token, Western political values and institutions continue to exert a magnetic attraction in the East. This, too, one would think, is one of the signs of the times worth pondering.

Two more points. Throughout *Millennium*, Fernández-Armesto stresses that initiative abroad requires at least a modicum of political stability and regime-legitimacy on the home front. But if that is the case, why is he so bullish on China and its leadership role in the third millennium? No one can doubt that explosive economic energy is being unleashed in China. By creating, over the next century, a vast middle class, that economic dynamism may eventually release the kind of liberalizing pressures that have already transformed the politics of South Korea and Taiwan. But regime-legitimacy and social control are maintained in China today only by brutalitarian methods: torture, slave labor, religious persecution, ethnic repression, female infanticide, the deliberate starvation of orphans. And would anyone seriously propose that the Chinese leadership has resolved the question of political succession? If the "rise of the East" depends in considerable part on the political stability of China, then the reversion of world-historical leadership eastward may be deferred longer than Fernández-Armesto expects.

Finally, although the collapse of civilizational morale evident in Western Europe these days does incline one to a certain pessimism about the future of the West, it is hard to know just how dynamic the newly assertive cultures in the Islamic world and in East Asia will continue to be. Islam has yet to show the capacity to resolve its longstanding conflicts with many aspects of modernity, not least the question of pluralism. And as for Confucian values and other manifestations of Asian religious traditions on display in every major American bookstore, these, at least in their present forms, have not displayed the capacity to transform other cultures in their own image and likeness.

ON THE edge of the third millennium, the culture formed by the complex interaction of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome remains the only civilizational force with demonstrably universal appeal. The lead society in the West, the United States, is showing impressive signs of cultural renewal and economic revitalization. To be sure, the continuing world-historical initiative of the West is no sure thing. But neither should one gainsay the possibility that there are considerable intellectual and moral resources left among the heirs of those people who turned a small promontory of Asia into the center of the world.

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OBSERVATIONS

Grantsmanship & the Killing Fields

Peter W. Rodman

In 1979, a journalist named William Shawcross vaulted to fame with *Sideshow*,* a book that accused Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon of responsibility for the genocide conducted in Cambodia in the mid 70's by the revolutionary Khmer Rouge regime. Fifteen years later, however, Shawcross came forth with a remarkable admission in the London *Times* (December 16, 1994):

> [T]hose of us who opposed the American war in Indochina should be extremely humble in the face of the appalling aftermath: a form of genocide in Cambodia and horrific tyranny in both Vietnam and Laos. Looking back on my own coverage for the London *Sunday Times* of the South Vietnamese war effort of 1970-75, I think I concentrated too easily on the corruption and incompetence of the South Vietnamese and their American allies, was too ignorant of the inhuman Hanoi regime, and far too willing to believe that a victory by the Communists would provide a better future.
>
> But after the Communist victory came the refugees to Thailand and the floods of boat people desperately seeking to escape the Cambodian killing fields and the Vietnamese gulags. Their eloquent testimony should have put paid to all illusions.

As it happens, even in 1979 Shawcross had been a "moderate" in comparison with his more zealous colleagues on the Left. He at least acknowledged and condemned what was happening in Cambodia, even as he asserted it was the consequence of American policies. As for those further to his Left, they hailed the Khmer Rouge as progressives, asserted that no genocide was taking place at all, and dismissed the horrific reports emanating from Cambodia—final estimates exceeded 1.5 million, or 20 percent of the population, systematically murdered by Pol Pot and his Communist cadres—as Pentagon disinformation.

Shawcross has offered his *mea culpa*. But whatever happened to those who denied the atrocities in the first place? It seems they get half-million-dollar grants from the U.S. Department of State to do research on Cambodia. That, at least, is the good fortune that has befallen Ben Kiernan, an Australian academic and political activist now teaching at Yale.

In 1994, Congress passed the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act, creating an office in the State Department to help the Cambodians compile documentation of Khmer Rouge crimes against humanity, with an eye toward an eventual international tribunal like the one at Nuremberg after World War II. A Yale team, led by Kiernan, beat out several other applicants for a $499,000 contract to carry out the work.

The State Department grant, not surprisingly, triggered a controversy. The journalist Christopher Ogden, writing in *Time*'s Asian edition, called on Secretary of State Warren Christopher to withdraw the contract. Stephen J. Morris, a Harvard-based researcher (and like Kiernan an Aus-

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* Reviewed in the August 1979 COMMENTARY by Charles Horner.

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tralian), wrote a long denunciation of the State Department decision in the *Wall Street Journal*, citing chapter and verse from Kiernan's numerous apologias for the Khmer Rouge in the mid-70's. A sampling:

> • There is ample evidence in Cambodian and other sources that the Khmer Rouge movement is not the monster that the press have recently made it out to be. ("Cambodia in the News, 1975-76," *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, 1976.)
>
> • Did the new government [of Cambodia] plan and approve a systematic large-scale purge? There is little evidence that they did. Apart from the execution of high-ranking army officers and officials, the killing reported by refugees from the northwest since April 1975 was instigated by untrained and vengeful local Khmer Rouge soldiers, despite orders to the contrary from Phnom Penh. . . .
>
> As a result of the Khmer Rouge immigration program, Cambodian agriculture will be modernized and peasant living standards increased. ("Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia," *Australian Outlook*, December 1976.)
>
> • Photographs of alleged atrocities [are] fake. . . . The Western press have more of an interest in a "bloodbath" in Cambodia than the Communists do because in the name of "preventing" such a bloodbath the West destroyed Cambodia with bombs and napalm. (Letter to *The Age* [Melbourne], March 2, 1977.)
>
> • After interviewing many refugees I have found, as others have, that each one's view of the revolution depends to a great extent on their class background. This is natural, since the revolution is decidedly biased in favor of the poor, in particular the peasantry. (Unpublished letter to the London *Times*, printed in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1977.)

Morris's criticism was answered by a barrage of personal attacks on *his* credentials from academic allies of Kiernan, and by the argument that Kiernan had anyway gotten over his youthful indiscretions and was now determinedly anti-Khmer Rouge.

Indeed, Kiernan's new book *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*,* provides ample evidence that he has had something of a change of heart. He draws on more than 500 interviews with Cambodian survivors, refugees, and defectors, as well as on previously unpublished archival materials (such as secret speeches by Pol Pot) to document the nature and the scope of the Khmer Rouge atrocities. His publisher bills this as "the first comprehensive study of the Khmer Rouge revolution," which it is not—Karl D. Jackson produced a more profound analysis, *Rendezvous With Death*, in 1989—but Kiernan's account is voluminous and detailed.

THE BOOK has its uses, then. But it does not extinguish doubts about Kiernan's fitness to do the work now assigned to him. For one thing, questions can be raised about the timing of his "conversion." His defenders date it to 1978-80, when, they say, the full extent of Khmer Rouge atrocities became known. But accounts of the atrocities in Khmer Rouge-controlled areas were common even before April 1975, and were universal knowledge thereafter. What happened in 1978-80 was not an outpouring of new information but a shift in the politics of the Indochina controversy—and that, in turn, was due to the escalation of the conflict between Communist Cambodia and Communist Vietnam.

When Hanoi turned publicly against Phnom Penh, it suddenly became respectable for many on the Left to "discover" the murderous qualities of the Khmer Rouge—qualities that had been obvious to unbiased observers for years. Kiernan fits this pattern nicely. His book even displays an eagerness to absolve of genocidal responsibility those members of the Khmer Rouge who defected to Hanoi and were later reinstalled in power in Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978.

That is not the only example of this book's skewed political analysis. Amid all the unexceptionable documentation of murder is a bizarre explanation of the Khmer Rouge genocide, to the effect that it was driven not simply by Communist revolutionary aims but by racial prejudice. Thus, Kiernan makes much of the Cambodian regime's nationalist rhetoric, suppression of various ethnic minorities, virulent hatred of the neighboring Vietnamese, and frequent denunciation of recalcitrant Cambodians as no better than Vietnamese ("Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds"). To Kiernan this suggests that the regime's ideology was an impure Marxism adulterated by racism.

The racial element in Khmer Rouge policy that Kiernan documents is indeed interesting, but to let Marxism-Leninism off the hook is absurd. As all accounts of the Cambodian horror demonstrate, it was a politically motivated auto-genocide—Cambodians murdering fellow Cambodians in the name of a Communist revolution.

When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh in 1975, they emptied the city of its three million inhabitants. Schools, hospitals, factories, offices, temples, and homes were evacuated at gunpoint, the city's structures razed and their occupants force-marched into the countryside. Typewriters, radios, televisions, phonographs, not to mention books, were destroyed as hated remnants of a culture to be eradicated. All officials and soldiers, even low-ranking ones, were

*Yale, 477 pp., $35.00.

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murdered, and, for good measure, so were their families. Schoolteachers, students, doctors, indeed, all those *known to wear eyeglasses* or to be able to read and write were annihilated for being "intellectuals" and, therefore, members of the bourgeoisie.

What was the inspiration of this social revolution? Its own leading spokesman, Khieu Samphan, wrote in his 1959 doctoral thesis at the University of Paris about the need to uproot Cambodian society, to do away with its corrupt urban centers, and to rebuild the country on the basis of the "dormant energy in the peasant mass." In June 1975, Kiernan published a gushing profile of Khieu Samphan, with his "unassuming manner, ready smile, and simple habits [which] endeared him to Khmer peasants." This was the same Khieu Samphan who presided over the Khmer Communist-party session in February 1975 that decided upon the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh and sent its inhabitants to the killing fields.

KIERNAN'S OWN ideological groundings are not hard to discern. One of his mentors was Wilfred Burchett, the Australian Stalinist who was notorious for his anti-American activities during the Korean war—bullying U.S. prisoners in Chinese-run prisoner-of-war camps, spreading the lie that the U.S. had waged germ warfare. For such activities, North Korea's "Great Leader," Kim Il-Sung, awarded Burchett a medal. Yet Kiernan, in 1986, long after his supposed "conversion" on the Khmer Rouge, edited a *Festschrift* in Burchett's honor, and Burchett is repeatedly cited in Kiernan's new book as an authority on Southeast Asia.*

What Kiernan learned from Burchett goes beyond these citations. Take the book's explanation of the Khmer Rouge ascension to power. Kiernan contends that between 1969 and 1975, U.S. military actions defending South Vietnam and Cambodia were "probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot's rise," and that Nixon and Kissinger "were largely responsible" for the radicalization of the Khmer Rouge. In other words, B-52 raids that ended in August 1973 explain Khmer Rouge brutality after April 1975—brutality which, as we have seen, was in plain fact the implementation of an ideological vision articulated in 1959. This is a crude parroting of the view propounded by William Shawcross in *Sideshow*, from which Shawcross himself has backed away. Kiernan may not still be pro-Khmer Rouge, but he is still profoundly anti-American.

A NUMBER of qualified research teams applied for the grant from the State Department. One was led by David Hawk, the founder of Amnesty International USA, another by Kassie Neou, a Cambodian human-rights advocate. Ironically, the Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, which awarded the grant, is now headed by Winston Lord—a former colleague of mine on Kissinger's Indochina negotiating team and in the Nixon White House. Thus, Lord has presided over the hiring of an individual whose core belief is that the men for whom Lord himself loyally worked, and the policies he helped to shape, were responsible for genocide. Whoever made the decision, it must inevitably take its place on the roster of national embarrassments this administration has inflicted on our foreign policy.

*For more on Wilfred Burchett, see "A Scandalous Journalistic Career" by Stephen J. Morris, COMMENTARY, November 1981.

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The Americans

Dorothea Straus

"GRANDFATHERS—A MEMOIR," by Christopher Clausen, appeared in COMMENTARY in April 1993. It is a thoughtful, personal essay on the costs of immigration—and specifically on Clausen's two immigrant grandfathers, each from a wholly different background and of a wholly different ethnicity. With neither undue blame nor idealization, Clausen, who teaches English literature at Pennsylvania State University, sketches the lives of his two forebears and comes to the conclusion that "it is rarely clear in the end who has been conquered more thoroughly, the immigrant or the new country." He sees now that "the ability to pass at will for a native—the perennial dream of the immigrant—may exact a bitter price from its possessor."

This timely message was overpowered for me, reading Clausen's essay, by an unexpected jolt as memory stirred. And just like someone fishing with a slack line who feels a tug, I raised my catch—a name from the past, out of the obliterating waters of the years.

ONE OF Christopher Clausen's grandfathers, his mother's father, was M.E. Ravage, a Romanian Jew (born Marcus Eli Revici) who made his way to America as a sixteen-year-old boy in 1900 and in an astoundingly brief period of time forged a career as a successful free-lance writer and journalist. This same M.E. Ravage, the author of *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant*, was still something of a lion when his daughter, Suzanne, and I became childhood friends and classmates ten years after the book was published in 1917. Now, as I peer backward in an attempt to distinguish the father's features, it is my friend's face that I see instead: hair as black as a gypsy's, serious, intelligent, dark glowing eyes, a long, firm, unchildlike jaw, a head overlarge for her slight body. My obstructed view of her father is formed by the recall of my mother's admiring expression at the mention of his name.

Childhood memories consist of disassociated tableaux separated by stretches of blankness. So now, when I reflect upon the Ravages, with the irrational clarity of a dream, I see that far-off person—myself, a child—staring out of our dining-room window, across Park Avenue, where the view of a rosy brick building insists upon intruding on my vision. I knew that it was a girls' school because of a puzzling experience connected with it, and also because at regular hours of the day I could watch apparently unattached, agitating arms and hands maintaining a basketball aloft in a gymnasium on the top floor, at eye level to our apartment. Just like the limbs of trees, divorced from their trunks, these female appendages waved and tossed in the wind-still enclosure. Again and again I was drawn to that window, and I longed as on a magic carpet to fly across the narrow space dividing me from those players, while at other times I had an impulse to pull down the shades, to block out those gesticulating branches of a human forest forever.

When I was about five years old, my mother and I passed through the white, pseudo-colonial door of this academy. We were ushered into a parlor furnished with stiff settees, the floor paved in discreet black-and-white checkerboard linoleum; a grandfather clock in a corner ticked away the moments, politely. Do I remember a maid in a frilly apron, carrying a feather duster, or is she only fancy's butterfly, trapped in astigmatic memory? My mother and I sat, side by side. I am not certain that at that early age I took notice of her ethereal beauty; gradually, as I grew up, and now, two generations later, I marvel at her fair, angelic face, the gentle harmony of her features, the chiseled perfection of bones barely covered by the transparency of her skin just as her nervous temperament and intellectual superiority could hardly be concealed behind the bland amenities required by the bourgeois society to which she belonged.

At last the headmistress, discreet and cool as the parlor where we

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waited, arrived. Her blue eyes, however, were probing, making me feel as though I were standing naked before a doctor. She and my mother conversed in quiet tones, and I was, largely, overlooked. Occasionally, a stray phrase from the headmistress came my way: ". . . intelligent, but immature . . . perhaps happier in a different type of school . . . we regret, but I am certain you will understand. . . ." On me the words had no particular impact, but as we prepared to leave my mother's face arrested me, blanched and shaken, like someone who has learned of an accident, shocking though foretold.

There was no mention, then or ever, of this incident. Its outcome, however, was my enrollment in a very different school, "semi-private" with "democratic ideals." That somber edifice, occupying an entire block across town on upper Broadway, still stands, but it has been put to other use. Then, it reminded me of an orphanage, and it seemed miles away from home. The student body of both sexes came from various economic levels, national and ethnic backgrounds. But first and foremost, we were all Americans. When we sang the national anthem, our pride was shared, and the "Stars and Stripes" in every classroom was communal property.

Yet, upon looking around, an outlander might well have asked, What is an American? I, for one, felt unworthy of citizenship when I was driven to school in the family limousine, and I persuaded Patrick, our Irish chauffeur who cared for me like a nanny, to let me out before we reached the ponderous black iron portals. If I looked back, I would be sure to see Patrick's familiar stout form, like a faithful bull watchdog standing on the sidewalk until I was safely swallowed up inside. I accelerated my steps.

About the school, I remember best its formidable plant: the maze of long corridors smelling of brass polish, disinfectant, chalk dust, and stale gravy from the cafeteria; our classrooms, a field of small, scarred desks clamped to the floor; bells that shrilled at intervals until, with the final one, the students stampeded, pushing and shoving toward the exit. There, a plaster reproduction of the Venus of Milo stood guard: one-armed, with empty eye sockets, she was the first to greet us in the morning, the last to bid us goodbye until tomorrow.

In the vast impersonality of this institution, I found Suzanne, my friend. On weekends, we enjoyed playing at my home or at the Ravages' apartment on Morningside Drive near Columbia University. I liked her pretty brunette mother, who spoke English with a French accent. But her Frenchness was merely decorative, and her Catholicism had withered away like a vestigial organ; she, too, was an American. I saw Suzanne's father rarely. But when he and his wife were guests at dinner, even then I felt him to be strange, in the midst of our own hermetic German-Jewish society.

Now, I realize he was a relatively new arrival, an East European Jew, and that we feared lest we be identified with Yiddish-speaking people who held to their traditional religion and customs. (My family and their friends would have been surprised to know that the sons and daughters of those very immigrants would soon form the intellectual center of New York City.) Four generations in the United States and the acquisition of wealth had, for the most part, made my family assimilationists. My father's forebears, who liked to think of themselves as German, burghers, inheritors of the Enlightenment, rather than Jews, had handed down a tradition of agnosticism which, by the time it reached my father, had been firmed into atheism, as strict as dogma. Accordingly, in my childhood, a scrupulous avoidance of any knowledge of Jewish roots was the accepted order of my upbringing.

But M. E. Ravage was an exception among his kind, and as such we awarded him welcome and respect. From the remove of the present day, I can still find the position on our library shelf of his autobiography, *An American in the Making*, among such disparate writers as Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, Jane Austen, George Meredith, Thomas Carlyle, and Edith Wharton. It was a brave handbook for the "melting pot": it told of his beginnings in a Romanian ghetto, his emigration alone at sixteen, and his rapid rise from sweatshop worker to successful journalist and biographer. Like my parents, he believed in intermarriage, and he had a Christian wife.

Many of our group, resembling honey bees inside a well-appointed hive, were awaiting the season for a general dispersion into and within Western society, innocent, unaware of what the near future held in store for Jews. Their anxiety went no further than the possibility of social exclusion. That topic was avoided in my home, but like a shadow it followed, mutely, the uncertain steps of my growing up.

M. E. Ravage's career as a New York City journalist specializing in European affairs caused him in due course to move with his family to Paris, and my friendship with Suzanne ended then, except for a brief postscript.

One summer, a year after her departure, while traveling abroad, we contacted the Ravages. The reunion took place in the Luxembourg Gardens. I was stunned to find that my American friend had turned into a proper Parisian girl, no different from all the others calling out in their games in glib, idiomatic French, at home along the historic paths of the Gardens bordered by classical statues in the stippled, venerable shade cast by ancient trees. Even the clouds appeared foreign, more massive, preg-

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nant with impending rain showers, in contrast to the fleecy lambs that floated above sunny Central Park. In the lives of children, in inverse ratio to their ages, a year may be as long as a lifetime, and at that last meeting, Suzanne and I had little to say to one another.

But now, having read "Grandfathers—A Memoir," I wrote Christopher Clausen to ask the whereabouts of his mother. It seemed impossible that this middle-aged man could be the son of my friend. I saw her as a nine-year-old shouldering a hoop and waving as we parted in the Luxembourg Gardens.

My subsequent letter to Suzanne elicited a prompt response, postmarked Berkeley, California. In a few lines she sketched her uprooted youth in France, her return to the United States for college, marriage on the verge of World War II, the birth of four sons, reared, unlike her, on American soil, her life in the academy. We exchanged, also, some reminders of our briefly shared past: "Do you remember the white statue of the blind, armless goddess standing behind the door of our school?" I asked. She wrote: "I can still see your brother's marvelous electric train." Our memories did not coincide. Recovery of the past is a lonely pursuit.

Recently, indeed, I received the sad news of the death of Suzanne Ravage Clausen. I had hoped, somehow, that we might meet again. But, despite that unexpected tug on the slackened line of memory, the "once upon a time" of the past can no longer be.

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN concludes his memoir with an account of a visit he paid in the early 1960's to his Jewish grandfather, then living in shabby lodgings in Paris. He was an old man, a failure, isolated (divorced from his first wife, remarried and widowed), without roots, an alien, a fake-American in France.

For me, his features are still hiding behind his daughter's face. But, just like a main character in a play who never is seen on stage, he is pivotal to the plot. In my mind's eye, I have added a fantasy to Christopher Clausen's account. The year is somewhat later. A student mob is congregated on the tidy grounds of some unnamed university campus. They are proclaiming, self-righteously, the rules of racial and ethnic separatism. I recognize the head, in effigy, of M. E. Ravage, apostle of assimilation, mounted on a pike.

MUSIC

Ms. Wonder-Child, For Example

Terry Teachout

ROBERT SCHUMANN'S 1840 song cycle, *Frauenliebe und Leben*, is a first-person account of the courtship, marriage, and widowhood of a young woman (the text was written by a man, the poet Adelbert von Chamisso). A new recording of it has appeared by the mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter, and the liner notes contain the following sentence: "The 'woman' in [these] poems is actually the voice of 19th-century male culture instructing wives how they should properly regard their husbands."[1]

That so baldly political a statement should have found its way into the notes for a major-label recording is a sign of how deeply the musical scene has been affected by the rise of a new academic disci-

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[1]Von Otter's superlative performance of *Frauenliebe und Leben*, accompanied by Bengt Forsberg, is part of a recital of songs by Schumann released earlier this year on DGG 445 881-2GH.

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pline, feminist musicology. Like "queer" musicology, its intellectual first cousin, feminist musicology is a branch of the gender-studies movement. Practitioners of this discipline believe that visible events in the world around us are merely outward manifestations of a hidden struggle between "privileged" oppressors and their powerless, alienated victims, and that it is therefore the duty of scholars to help "liberate" the victim class by unmasking the machinations of its victimizers. In thrall to this mode of thought, progressive-minded musicologists have proceeded to construe the culture of classical music as a sexual battlefield.

To date, the most widely circulated introduction to the new musicology is a collection of essays edited by Ruth A. Solie, a professor of music at Smith College, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*.[2] The titles of the various essays in this book tell much about its basic *tendenz*: "Difference and Power in Music"; "Loving It: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes"; "The Ethnomusicologist as Midwife"; "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts"; and "Reading as an Opera Queen." As for the book's overall flavor, it is adequately conveyed by Solie's comments on an essay by Susan McClary, a much-cited feminist musicologist at McGill University whose publications include a "homosexual analysis" of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. McClary, Solie says,

> has elaborated an analysis of musical tonality as the representation of Self and Other, and one all the more profoundly ideological because the terms of the system predetermine the outcome. Her essay here reads Brahms's Third Symphony as a gendered encounter that makes use of musical codes of publicly understood signification—understood because once associated with texted music before having been cut loose to carry their familiar meanings into the "absolute" realm.

It is easy to make fun of such *faux*-Marxist jabber. It is also easy to overstate its significance: although gender-conscious musicology is at present a hot ticket in many music departments, comparatively few working musicians have even heard of its existence. Still, the movement has had its practical consequences, perhaps the most salient of which is the growing attention paid by the musical establishment to the work of women composers. Not only are contemporary women composers—Libby Larsen, Tania Léon, Thea Musgrave, Joan Tower, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, and others—represented with increasing frequency on the programs of symphony orchestras, but a number of older female composers have been granted quasi-classic status by a new generation of critics—most of them men—eager to demonstrate their solidarity with the feminist cause.

The latest manifestation of this phenomenon is *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*.[3] This volume is one of the many offshoots of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the principal English-language encyclopedia of the history of music. Many, perhaps most, of its 875 biographical entries on women composers of Western classical music are perfectly matter-of-fact and betray no political agenda. (I particularly like the one on Anne Boleyn: "Though often said to be a composer, she is not in fact known to have written any music.") But other entries are tendentious—some extremely so.

One way to look at *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* is to consider its approach, both implicit and explicit, to a question that has long bedeviled feminists: why are there no great women composers?

Aaron Copland summed up the state of this question *circa* 1960 in an essay about his distinguished teacher of composition, Nadia Boulanger:

> Everyone knows that the high achievement of women musicians as vocalists and instrumentalists has no counterpart in the field of musical composition. This historically poor showing has puzzled more than one observer. It is even more inexplicable when one considers the reputation of women novelists and poets, of painters and designers. . . . The future may very well have a different tale to tell; for the present, however, no woman's name will be found on the list of world-famous composers.

Why was this so? Feminists have given varying answers over the years. Their original explanation was conventionally ideological: male oppression made it impossible for women to develop successfully as composers, a situation that would change as they liberated themselves. But this "answer" soon proved unsatisfactory. As *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* shows, women have always written music (the earliest known being Sappho); the problem is that their work has failed to make a lasting impression. And so a new answer was proposed: there *were* great women composers, but their achievements were suppressed by the male ruling class. It follows, according to this logic, that the job of feminist critics and musicologists is to find such hitherto unknown masterpieces, and revise the canon so as to include them.

Indeed, a few women composers of secondary but nonetheless genuine quality have been rediscov-

[2]University of California Press, 355 pp., $15.00 (paper).

[3]Norton, 548 pp., $45.00.

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ered as a result of such endeavors. They include Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979), an English violist who produced a small body of chamber music and songs of considerable finish and originality, but who stopped composing in the 1940's and subsequently vanished into obscurity. And at least one composer of still greater promise—Lili Boulanger (1893-1918), the younger sister of Nadia—is rightly praised in *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* for the "solemnity, grandeur, vivid contrasts, and technical mastery" of her music; her career was tragically cut short by fatal illness.[4]

But there is also a very great deal of inflation at work in this campaign of rediscovery. Thus, Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), a Victorian suffragette whose operas enjoyed a brief vogue in England at the turn of the century, is hailed in the *Norton/Grove Dictionary* as "a first-rate composer," and Amy Beach (1867-1944), whose late-romantic scores received numerous performances in the United States around the same time, is praised as "the first American woman to succeed as a composer of large-scale art music."

UNFORTUNATELY, THE music of these women does not hold up to the close scrutiny made possible by recent recordings of their compositions. In spite of the best efforts of sympathetic performers and critics, it is hard to argue that the work of Amy Beach, Ethel Smyth, or the French salon composer Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944), who has also been the object of especially fervent advocacy, is anything other than well-made, stylistically derivative, and of limited interest.[5]

The inability of the feminist musicological project successfully to uncover a vast number of unheralded major women composers seems, indeed, to have inspired yet another shift in tactics. It is nicely illustrated by Rhian Samuel, a co-editor of the *Norton/Grove Dictionary*, in her introductory essay, "Women's Music: A Twentieth-Century Perspective":

> The issue of "quality" in music can provide a convenient means of dismissing women's music, both heard and unheard. . . . What if a woman composer should speak differently from a man? Should she not then be evaluated differently? The fact of sociological conditioning certainly encourages us to consider the likelihood of a "gendered voice" for both men and women. And given the physicality and sensuousness of music itself, is it beyond the realms of possibility that even biology might have some influence on musical utterance too?

Readers unfamiliar with the argot of literary theory may fail at first to grasp the implications of this passage. But those who know the territory will see at once that Samuel is here adhering to the belief, popular among literary theorists and minority critics, that time-honored standards of aesthetic "quality" and "greatness" are in fact tools of oppression. The compositions of men and women are thus not to be judged according to the same criteria: to do so would be "phallocentric." The idea of greatness itself being an arbitrary construct, a manifestation of the false consciousness of our patriarchal culture, the awkward fact that there have been no great women composers is thus rendered altogether meaningless.

In practice, most of the dictionary's appraisals of pre-19th-century composers reflect conventional standards of critical judgment. (Chiefly responsible for these entries is the other co-editor, Julie Anne Sadie, a much-admired early-music scholar.) But these standards grow ever more flexible as the dictionary moves forward in time, until we reach entries like the one devoted to Kay Gardner, also known as "Cosmos Wonder-Child," an American composer born in 1941. Her professional activities are described as follows:

> A pioneer of women's music who declared her lesbianism in 1971, she has been an active composer-performer of women's music since 1973 and has appeared regularly at festivals of women's music. Her exploration of healing music has gained recognition through her presentations to medical schools and health workers, as well as her work to develop the use of music as a substitute for surgical anaesthesia. . . . She believes in specifically feminine modes of expression, for example cyclical form with central points of climax.

No room was found in the original *New Grove* for Ms. Wonder-Child; in the present volume, she is represented by a 27-line article, a work list, a bibliography, and a photograph. By such yardsticks can the long march of feminist consciousness-raising be measured.

THE EMERGENCE of a critical theory that attacks the very idea of greatness is, of course, a sign not of self-assurance but of deep-seat-

[4]Clarke's Viola Sonata (1919) and Piano Trio (1921) have been recorded in excellent performances by pianist Martin Roscoe and members of the Endellion Quartet (ASV CD DCA 932). Boulanger's lovely song cycle, *Clairières dans le ciel*, is available on Hyperion CDA 66726, performed by tenor Martyn Hill and pianist Andrew Ball; in addition, French EMI has reissued a CD of her works for chorus and orchestra, conducted by Igor Markevitch (EMI France CDM 7 64281 2).

[5]Beach's "Gaelic" Symphony, Op. 32, has been recorded by Neeme Järvi and the Detroit Symphony (Chandos CHAN 8958). *The Wreckers*, Smyth's most ambitious opera, can be heard in a live performance by the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Odaline de la Martinez, who specializes in women's music (Conifer 75605-51250-2, two CD's). Chaminade's Concertino for Flute and Orchestra, Op. 107, has been recorded several times, most recently by Susan Milan, Richard Hickox, and the City of London Sinfonia (Chandos CHAN 8840).

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ed anxiety—in other words, a sign of the times. Feminist criticism notwithstanding, it remains the case that no woman composer of the past has yet been widely acknowledged as great. Nor has any contemporary woman composer attained a stature in the world of music similar to that of such postwar male composers as Benjamin Britten or Dmitri Shostakovich. In fact, one is hard-pressed to name a recent piece of music by a woman composer (of whom there are plenty) that has made an impression on the listening public—positive or negative—remotely comparable to that of, say, Henrik Górecki's Third Symphony or John Adams's opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*.

In his 1960 essay, Aaron Copland dared to ask the unspoken question that lies just behind the aggressive advocacy of feminist musicologists: "Is it possible that there is a mysterious element in the nature of musical creativity that runs counter to the nature of the feminine mind?" The starkness of the alternatives implied by this question makes less sense now than it did 36 years ago; it is abundantly clear that women can compose, and that they can compose music of quality. (In addition, Copland failed to consider the notable achievements of women in jazz and American popular music, two fields which also go largely unaddressed by the editors of the *Norton/Grove Dictionary*.) But the underlying question has not gone away: why have women so far failed to compose music on a level with that of Mozart, Schubert, or Bartók—or, for that matter, Copland?

It is of course conceivable, as some feminists suggest, that women have not composed masterpieces in part because men have told them they are incapable of doing so. But the complete absence of major women composers from the history of Western classical music—a situation which, as Copland points out, has no counterpart in other art forms—suggests another possibility: women as a group may simply have a lower mean innate aptitude for large-scale musical composition than men.

This hypothesis, it seems to me, has numerous advantages over the various feminist explanations of the gender gap in musical greatness. It lends itself to empirical verification. It does not assume that no great woman composer will ever appear, merely that the odds against it are at present higher for women than for men. It allows for the existence of environmental effects, whether partial or decisive, on group differences in compositional aptitude. And it is compatible with another hypothesis popular among feminists (including Rhian Samuel): the belief that the minds of men and women do not work in the same way—that they are, to use the word so beloved of feminist musicologists, different.

In a less intensely politicized culture, musicologists might be expected to give serious consideration to such a hypothesis. But one need only recall the critical reception of Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* to gauge the likely response to it of the academic community, most of which passionately embraces a credo of radical egalitarianism. In the court of academic opinion, genetic explanations of group differences, including differences between women and men, are only allowed to be entertained when these differences are presumed to result in equal outcomes.

Small wonder, then, that those who begin by refusing to accept the plain fact that there are as yet no great women composers inevitably end by asserting that there is no such thing as aesthetic quality; that Cosmos Wonder-Child and Lili Boulanger are in some meaningful sense "equal" to each other; and that both are equal to Mozart.

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Books in Review

Of Things Past

The First Man
by Albert Camus
translated by David Hapgood
Knopf. 325 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
André A. Aciman

On October 16, 1957, Albert Camus was sitting in a restaurant in Paris. A waiter rushed up to announce that the writer had just been awarded the Nobel Prize. Incredulous, visibly more shaken than pleased, Camus could do little more than mutter that the prize should have gone to André Malraux instead.

Camus had reason to be stunned: at forty-four, he was too young for the prize. But he was hardly undeserving. A prolific writer, he had been in the public eye for over twenty years—not only as an essayist, novelist, critic, and political thinker, but also as a journalist, actor, playwright, publisher, and political activist.

After World War II, during which he served in the French Resistance, Camus had become one of the towering luminaries of French intellectual life, associated not only with the Left in politics but with the existentialist movement in art and philosophy. But then, disenchanted with systems and parties, he had begun to cultivate the sort of contemplative, introspective humanism which his former comrades were quick to label "bourgeois." As an erstwhile Communist sympathizer who had the courage to voice his disillusionment with Soviet totalitarianism, he was attacked by French leftists—preeminent among them Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom Camus conducted a notorious public feud—eager to defend the Soviet system against any and all criticism. But he was also assailed by the Right for his willingness to make concessions to Arab nationalists in his native Algeria. To complicate matters further, although he did indeed sympathize with the Algerian Arabs and defended them vigorously, he conspicuously stopped short of endorsing the terrorist tactics of the National Liberation Front (FLN), and was adamant about the legitimacy of French claims in North Africa. Ultimately, his fellow Algerian Frenchmen were as distrustful as his Arab friends of the fanciful hopes he entertained for a French-Arab federation. In the end, in this as in everything, Camus was an outsider.

The Nobel Prize brought many good things to Camus, but it came at a particularly difficult moment in his life. Although he had published *The Fall* a year earlier, in 1956, he had entered a slow, dry, tentative phase—a fact that stirred no end of anxiety in a man who had always written with a great deal of agility and flair and who, faced now with disquieting doubts, could not help being mindful that the Nobel Prize was usually conferred at the end of a long literary career.

Would he write again? And would anything he wrote ever supersede his earlier work? Would people ever stop comparing every-

André A. Aciman *teaches French literature at Princeton. His memoir,* Out of Egypt, *sections of which originally appeared in* Commentary, *was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1995.*

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thing he wrote to *The Stranger* (1942), a work of his late twenties? Many factors conspired to suggest that he was, if not finished, at least quite consumed. His marriage was not satisfying, the political situation in Algeria, where his brother and mother continued to live, was becoming ever more volatile, and Paris, though full of rewards for a man seeking the luster of an intellectual *dolce vita*, had never slaked his thirst for intimacy and/or good fellowship. His own *Notebooks* bear testimony to what must have been a tortured period in his life:

> *October 17.* Nobel. Strange feeling of depression and melancholy. At 20, poor and naked, I found real glory. . . .
>
> * * *
>
> *October 19.* . . . I must overcome this kind of terror and incomprehensible panic in which the unexpected news has thrown me . . . This month, three fits of breathlessness exacerbated by claustrophobic panic. Disorientation.
>
> * * *
>
> *December 29.* New panic attack. . . .
>
> *Night of 29/30.* Endless anxieties.
>
> *January 1.* Redoubled anxiety.

Only later in 1958, when he began work on an autobiographical novel, provisionally entitled *Adam* and later *The First Man*, did Camus seem to find his bearings again. By then something had changed. It was not just that he was now writing about his own life. Like Stendhal, like Proust, Camus had long littered his work with attempts at autobiographical writing; many of his essays are musings in this vein. What was special now was that an author who had made a name for himself as a controversial and above all an *intellectual* writer was attempting to capture his own life in a manner that could only be called retrograde.

Indeed, in her introduction to the English translation of *The First Man*, the unfinished draft of which was found in a briefcase next to the wreckage of the car accident that took Camus's life in 1960, Catherine Camus, the author's daughter, explains that one of the reasons the family withheld publishing it was that her father had too many enemies eager to pounce on so highly personal, so sentimental, and hence so vulnerable a book. This was not an ideological novel; nor was it another *roman à thèse*, where intellectual notions masquerade as characters in a thinly veiled plot tangled with ethical-philosophical questions. Unlike *The Stranger*, *The Plague* (1947), or *The Fall*, all novels of ideas—indeed, top-heavy with ideas—*The First Man* soars on gossamer wings. Its lightness, its overall lack of brooding pessimism, its blend of serene yet stark presentation of character, mark a significant new register in Camus. This sudden efflorescence of a new, less ironic, almost soulfully lyrical voice might well have left the book defenseless against those who, in Catherine Camus's words, "were saying Camus was through as a writer." Thus it lay buried for 34 years.

The First Man is about growing up in extreme poverty, about the necessity of inventing oneself out of nothing, about gratitude, loyalty, beauty, and love. As it opens, the parents of Jacques Cormery (Albert Camus), impoverished French migrants, are riding in a carriage in the rain, hastening to reach a shelter where the wife will give birth. The year is 1913, and though the town of Solferino in Algeria is not Bethlehem, Jacques Cormery's initials suggest beguiling parallels with the Nativity.

A year later, Jacques's father, whom the boy never meets, has gone back to France to fight in the war and dies there of a wound brought on by a shell splinter, leaving the family to fend for itself

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in penury. Everyone moves to Belcourt, one of the poorer neighborhoods of Algiers, where Jacques will grow up in the company of his mother, a charwoman; his grandmother, an embittered, stern matriarch; and his kindly uncle Etienne, who builds kegs for a living. The boy learns to play with others his age in the smothering heat on the sidewalks of Algiers, using his wits and fists, but finally catches the attention of a well-intentioned schoolteacher who coaches him for a high-school scholarship. Jacques is, in fact, entranced by learning. But, at the edge of adolescence—where the manuscript ends—he is also very much of the earth, and of the beaches, and in that quandary we leave him.

At times, without meaning to, *The First Man* lapses into what sounds like first-person autobiography. Signs of this are the passages in which individuals are suddenly referred to not by their fictional but by their real names. Not least of these is Jacques's mother, who sometimes appears here not as the widow Cormery but as the *Veuve Camus*, a name which—as Camus remarks in his *Notebooks*—she used into her old age even though she had lived with her husband for the briefest period and could hardly remember him. "What year was he born?" inquires Jacques in *The First Man*. "I don't know. I was four years older." "And you, what year were you born?" "I don't know. Look in the family book . . . it was a long time ago."

This scene held a haunting appeal for Camus; it appears not only in *The First Man* but in his *Notebooks* and in "Between Yes and No," a ten-page version of his autobiography written when he was only twenty-two years old. Both versions mention the dead father, the shell splinter turned into family heirloom, the abusive and authoritarian grandmother, the dark and dirty stairway with its grimy banister, and above all Jacques's mother, a listless and distracted woman, half-deaf and also somewhat vacant, who spends hours staring at nothing and everyone, absent, silent, and submissive, forever holding a handkerchief which she rolls into a ball between arthritic fingers. The family itself is afflicted with congenital muteness. In a note appended to *The First Man*, Camus reminds himself that, to convey his mother's speech, he must limit his vocabulary to 400 words only. Uncle Etienne, the most colorful character in the book, is totally deaf, a handsome debonair who speaks only in yelps and yaps and "scraps of sentences."

Still, everything in the house is also filled with an almost ferocious animal love. The grandmother, a severe, almost cruel disciplinarian, lands her grandson his first job by lying to his future employer—and, of course, punishes the young Jacques whenever *he* lies to *her*. It is she who manages household affairs; and her weak-willed daughter always defers to her. The grandmother is stubborn, irate, thrifty, a tremendously vivid personality, even if not the one who, finally, haunts the pages of this book.

That person is, again, Jacques's mother, who never understands much of anything, including her own "misfortune," who has "difficulty thinking," whose memory is *entenbré*, clouded, who cannot pray, and who, much later, in one of the novel's flash-forward scenes, unable to grasp the extent to which the situation of French Algerians has deteriorated, will turn down her grown son's invitation to come live with him in France. ("Oh no," she says, "it's too cold over there. I'm too old now. I want to stay home.") It is to this woman in Belcourt that the adult Jacques, a writer, returns each time from Paris, rushing up the stairs, four treads at a time, his body still remembering the exact height of each riser, his mind devoid of words. For words, which have become his trade, are superfluous in this household and are no substitute for love. "He is her son, she is his mother," wrote a younger Camus in "Between Yes and No." Proust had done no better, trying to speak of his love for his grandmother. "She was my grandmother, and I was her grandson."

The First Man is dedicated "To you who will never be able to read this book." Would she never read it because she would not live long enough to see it completed, or because she did not know how to read, or even understand when she was being read to, and was therefore condemned to be forever alienated from the most significant part of her son's life—which would also mean that she would never be able to read the dedication itself, or know of it, or thank him for it, or even be moved by it? In fact, it is doubtful that Camus's mother did understand much when they came to tell her in 1960 that once again someone dear to her had perished in a violent accident in France. As the biographer Herbert Lottman writes, "Reporters arrived at Camus's mother's apartment late on January 4, but when they realized that she knew nothing, they stammered that they were looking for someone else." Friends finally announced the news to her. She survived Albert only a little over nine months, dying in her Belcourt apartment in September 1960.

THE DEDICATION is not the only moment in *The First Man* marked by dislocation and profound irony. The adult Jacques/Albert finally goes to visit his father's tombstone in France:

> He read two dates: "1885-1914," and automatically did the arithmetic: twenty-nine years. Suddenly he was struck by an idea that shook his entire body. He was forty years old. The man buried under that slab, who had

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been his father, was younger than he.

This sudden capsizing of one's entire being is not an uncommon event in Camus's work in general, or in existentialist literature as a whole. What saves the moment here is Camus's refusal to draw a large, overarching moral from this mystifying puzzle, or even to resolve it philosophically. His sense of helpless confusion is what has stirred him to set out on this journey in search of his father. Although it is also a search after such grand concepts as identity, truth, heritage, and the "tangled hidden roots that attached him to this magnificent and frightening land," here the philosopher has freed the novelist to do as he pleases, which happens to be the one thing he does best: simply to remember.

And that is where the beauty of *The First Man* lies. It is a beauty found in Camus's superlatively lyrical collections of essays—*Nuptials*, *Summer*, *The Wrong Side and the Right Side*—works which, like his *Notebooks*, are seldom read but rival anything he is famous for. In these essays, too, the boy who was born in poverty speaks of his love for North Africa, its cities, its ruins, its people, its odors, its sea. But in *The First Man*, the prose is less sinewy than in earlier renderings of the same material, more supple, and more elegiac, as though drawing inspiration directly from Proust as it recalls

> the odor of burned grass, of manure, of algae, the strong smell of fermenting grapes and of grape liquor; the smell of varnished rulers, and pen cases; the delicious taste of the strap of his satchel that he would chew on at length while laboring over his lessons; the sharp bitter smell of purple ink . . . the soft feel of the smooth glossy pages in certain books, which also gave off the good smell of print and glue, and finally, on rainy days, the smell of wet wool that emanated from the school coats at the end of the classroom.

This is not to say that *The First Man* is altogether purged of the sort of intellectual—and at times clunkily symbolic—content of the philosophical novel, or that, in subsequent drafts, Camus might not have yielded to the impulse to write "big" themes. There is, for example, that opening scene, almost embarrassingly kitschy, of the man and his pregnant wife in the carriage, and then there are those initials: Jacques Cormery. The title itself, *The First Man*, smacks of Camus's compulsive inability to leave ideas alone—or to avoid announcing them with resounding gongs. Although Camus is writing about his own life, he is also writing about a "country" whose history, he claims, is as unremembered as it is unrecorded—the country of the poor, whose uncompleted narratives blend in the dust and are buried in the sand storm. For "poor people's memory," he writes,

> is less nourished than that of the rich; it has fewer landmarks in space because they seldom leave the place where they live, and fewer reference points in time throughout lives that are gray and featureless. Of course, there is the memory of the heart that they say is the surest kind, but the heart wears out with sorrow and labor, it forgets sooner under the weight of fatigue. Remembrance of things past [Proust, again!] is not just for the rich.

One hears, in these lines, the distant rattling of anti-bourgeois propaganda. But if one listens carefully, one also hears the salute of one comprehensive master of memory to another. Remembrance of things past, these words say, is for *everyone*.

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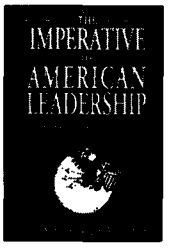

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Dead End

The Road Ahead
by Bill Gates
with Nathan Myhrvold
and Peter Rinearson
Viking. 286 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
David Gelernter

The Road Ahead is Bill Gates's State of the Union address, delivered with the shambling, endearing, self-deprecating grandeur that is appropriate to the cofounder and CEO of Microsoft, the King of Technocrats. Gates tells us where the computer world stands today, accepts with due modesty his share of applause for bringing us here, and presents his program for the future. Aside from the occasional anecdote about Gates himself or about Microsoft, and the odd snippet of technological history, the book is mostly taken up with well-informed, prudent-to-a-fault speculation about the near future of computers and software and how they will change the world.

The failure of *The Road Ahead* is the failure of modern technology writing in general: when technical people write books, they tend to assume that "a nontechnical audience" means children. Gates expects us to enthuse over predictions that are old or hackneyed or trivial. He is evidently so scared of talking over our heads that he refuses to allow even the barest whiff of scientific or technical or intellectual substance to intrude; too worried about offending to stake out controversial positions on government involvement in technology, or anything else. He discusses objections to computers without letting on that he has ever heard of the raging cultural-significance-of-computing debate, of books like Clifford Stoll's *Silicon Snake Oil* or Sven Birkerts's *The Gutenberg Elegies*; for all I know, he never has. And he sets everything down in conventional prose and frames it in conventional attitudes. *The Road Ahead* is USDA-certified Idea Free, and as seductive as warm milk. Only at rare energetic moments does it rise from the insipid to the actually sappy.

Gates seems, often, to be striving to convey as little information as possible:

> The [information] highway will be indispensable because it will offer a combination of information, education services, entertainment, shopping, and person-to-person communication. We can't be sure yet exactly when all the necessary components will be ready.

Again: the computer "isn't, as people sometimes seem to expect, a magical universal panacea." There are loads of sentences like that. But give him this: he believes so deeply in the technological future that he is willing to make himself ridiculous in the quest to sell it. Internet shopping, he writes, will be faster than the old-fashioned kind, and "you could use the time you saved from shopping to think up a fun clue to put on the package, or create a personalized card." Comes the Revolution, "you'll watch *Gone With the Wind* with your own face and voice replacing Vivien Leigh or Clark Gable."

THERE IS a dark side to all this treacle. When we come to education, Gates is eager to tell us how "Howard Gardner, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, argues that different children must be taught differently, because individuals understand the world in different ways." (That is the kind of insight that made Harvard famous. Gates and Gardner are a wonderful team.) He reassures us that computers will not make teachers obsolete. But in fact a rising tide of opinion holds that computers in the classroom are not merely useless but destructive. They promote pictures over words, glitz over substance, breadth over depth. They waste time on intellectually vacuous fun and games when children need desperately to learn the basics.

Classroom computing means "multimedia," in which each bit of information is escorted to the computer screen by pictures, sound effects, music, video. The idea is to spice up the presentation, but the perverse consequence of serving these delicious chocolate-coated Reading Tidbits is to spare children the bother of using their imaginations and to make ordinary words seem even more tedious than they do already. Multimedia may in time bring us to regard the requirement that children read books as abusive—on the order of forcing them to study Latin. There are schools today, after all, where children are taught to punch calculators instead of learning arithmetic.

Classroom computing also means "hypertext": one click of the mouse and you escape across a "link" from the paragraph you have just seen to any of a large number of others, whatever strikes your fancy. Here the idea is to make it easy to pursue your interests wherever they lead; and the perverse message is that sticking with something, concentrating on a text or an argument and not bailing out even if it gets difficult or (God forbid!) boring, is a waste of time.

If our schools were in good shape, educational software of this kind might be harmless or even useful. But at a time when reading, thinking, and concentrating are all under assault, they are potentially

---

DAVID GELERNTER, *professor of computer science at Yale, is the author of* 1939: The Lost World of the Fair. *Among his essays in techno-punditry are* Mirror Worlds *(1991) and* The Muse in the Machine *(1994).*

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disastrous. *Of course* every child will need to be able to operate a computer; but to do so proficiently takes a few weeks of practice, and reorganizing the curriculum around computing is like reorganizing it around driver's-ed. In Baltimore, the principal of an inner-city public school has replaced her "progressive" curriculum with a traditional one borrowed from a nearby private school, rejecting in the process self-esteem exercises, experimental teaching methods, and (according to the *New Republic*) "even computers." The results have been excellent. Gates's thoughts about all this would have been worth knowing. But he seems not to have any.

Just barely discernible in *The Road Ahead* (like paint traces on ancient furniture) are the outlines of a good book that might have been. Gates is smart and has been around. When he writes about his life and career, he has interesting things to say, and *Microsoft: The Inside Story* might have made for great reading. But here he functions like a tour guide who intrigues us with tantalizing spiels but never lets us off the bus.

For example, he describes a bank of 24 jumbo computer screens in the home he is building on a lake near Seattle. The screen bank, six wide by four high, is designed to "work cooperatively to display large images for artistic, entertainment, or business purposes." You can, for instance, see "paintings by Henri Matisse," or any one of a million-odd other images Gates has amassed.

And that is the end of a discussion that *might* have led into a fascinating topic: how can computers help deliver art in reproduction? Imagine what might have happened at this point. Gates might first have dealt with some obvious objections: "You've missed the point. Those screens are interesting not, as you seem to think, because they can display so many images at a moment's notice—if you spent your money on picture books instead of computer screens, you'd wind up with more images than you would ever have time to look at. The screen bank is interesting because it's *big*. Take Matisse, since you mentioned him. Sheer acreage under paint is often important to his emotional impact, and your screens can get much closer to life size than books can. Just one problem, though: what kind of nitwit wants to look at Matisse on computer screens? When it comes to resolution and accurate color, books have screens hopelessly outclassed."

To which Gates might have responded by discussing possible improvements in screen technology. Today's screen, for example, is constrained by the requirement that each color dot on its face must come immediately to life when the electron beam beats on it and fade fast when the beam goes away, to allow the image to change quickly. But if we were willing to wait a while for Matisse to come up to full strength, could we build "slow screens" with better color? I cannot say, but it might be worth investigating.

Or Gates might have conceded the objection but gone on from there. "Instead of screens," he might have said, "imagine a bank of high-quality color printers, each rigged to print one long strip of a large image on translucent plastic. When you asked for Matisse, the image would rise in a dozen parallel strips from a dozen printers, and be lit by an oversized light box from behind. Color and resolution would be good. And what is interesting about *this* approach is that non-billionaires could afford it. Microsoft could develop software to make any color printer produce life-sized copies of any image in the Gates collection on continuous paper strips. If you were willing to cut and assemble, you could have life-sized fake Matisses of your own.

"Still," Gates might have continued, "the best way by far to look at art reproductions is on old-fashioned 35-millimeter slides. They have superb color and resolution, and you can make the projected image as big as you want. They beat color printers any day, and leave my screen bank behind in the dust.

"But art slides tend to be expensive and hard to track down. How could I use computers to attack *those* problems? Brainstorm: Microsoft and Corbis [the Gates company that owns the images in the Gates library] could set up an 'automatic slide-by-mail' operation. When you logged onto the Internet and went to the Corbis Web site, you would be able to type in an order for a 35-millimeter slide of any image in my library. The order would go to my

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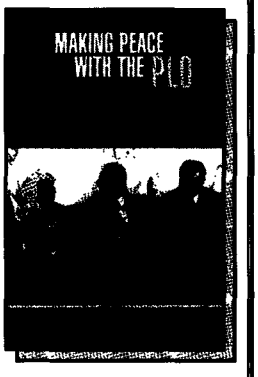

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new slide plant, robot-operated and software-controlled. In ordering the slide, you would directly initiate a sequence of operations that would cause it to be produced, packaged, and handed to an overnight shipper. Because the operation would be completely automated and Corbis would own all the rights, the slides would be cheap, shopping would be easy, delivery fast.

"An interesting side-issue: the software controlling the photo factory would be a 'parallel' or 'ensemble' system, with lots of programs working concurrently on the same result—a hot topic today. What that means in practice is. . . ."

And so forth. The end result might have been a useful discussion of art and computers, a simple demonstration of technological thinking in action, an introduction to an important new species of software, even a new service that some readers (and many schools and libraries) might actually have used. Back on earth, Gates's attitude toward the whole matter seems to be, "Why bother?"

A GOOD book about "the road ahead" would be very different from Gates's effort: it would take computers seriously. It would describe the inspiring possibilities: how computers might help unwind the bureaucratic web in which a rich modern country inevitably mummy-wraps every citizen (unless he happens to be Bill Gates); how they might save us time minding money, paying bills, looking out for the car, keeping up the house, making dates and remembering them, tracking down the things we need to know, plotting trends, anticipating problems; how they could give us, on a daily basis, the gifts we need most—time for our families, time to think. It would describe the revolution that computers are making in science and engineering. It would explain why today's electronic newspapers have been failures and why future, radically different versions might succeed. It would tell us how computers can make government, transportation, health care, and the military run better. *And* it would be serious about the threats computers pose: how they bring out the worst in us; how they waltzed onstage hawking glitz, superficiality, and ignorance just as glitz, superficiality, and ignorance were coming into their own.

Gates himself, at home with both technical and "real world" issues, might be the perfect man to write such a book. But in one sense the effort would have been wasted: *The Road Ahead* is a best-seller anyway. Don't bother with champagne, he must have figured, if the public will drink Kool-Aid. You don't get to be Bill Gates by breaking *that* rule.

Hillarytown

It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us

by Hillary Rodham Clinton

Simon & Schuster. 319 pp. $20.00

Reviewed by
Chester E. Finn, Jr.

IN OUR assessment of this agreeably written and intermittently charming book, let us put aside the weighty and much-mulled matters of Hillary Clinton's personal integrity and veracity, her role in sundry White House malefactions, and her legal and commodities-trading career in Little Rock. Let us not dwell on who wrote which pages of this volume—its "acknowledgments" are the vaguest I have ever seen. And let us even ignore the question of why she has published it at this moment.

Mrs. Clinton, after all, does not say that this book—issued with huge fanfare eight months before the voters pass judgment on her husband and, inevitably, on herself—is part of a careful strategy to change her image and reposition herself for the 1996 campaign. We find no hint here that she might be trying to deflect attention from her well-lit woes. Instead, she asserts that her sole purpose in writing is to "share . . . some of the convictions I've developed over a lifetime . . . about what our children need from us and what we owe to them. . . ."

It is precisely those "convictions," held as they are by the tougher and more consistent half of the White House duo, that deserve our scrutiny.

CERTAINLY, THERE is some wisdom in the African proverb from which Mrs. Clinton derives her title: "It takes a whole village to raise a child." We know that even exemplary parents are seldom solo practitioners of the art of child-rearing. They will have an easier time of it, and their progeny are apt to be better off, if the immediate family functions within a web of loving grandparents, attentive neighbors, preacher, teacher, scoutmaster, friendly postman, camp counselor, and cop on the beat.

That, indeed, is what "mediating structures" and "civil society"—terms invented or resuscitated in modern times by conservatives—are all about. It is what Jane Jacobs depicted as the heartbeat of neighborhood vitality in her memorable *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). It is also a large part of what Tocqueville admired in the America he visited in the 1830's. We know that village when we see it. We also know it is not as common as perhaps it once was or should be now.

Like most proverbs, however,

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"it takes a whole village to raise a child" contains the seeds of misinterpretation alongside its kernel of wisdom. Hillary Clinton, unfortunately, appears to have carefully tended the seed and cast the kernel aside. In her village, parents are often *supplanted* by other villagers—by the elected officials, expert professionals, and government bureaucrats whom she sees as fairer, more predictable, and more competent than parents in making decisions about children.

This peculiar vision is on display in each of the book's eighteen chapters—one for almost every hot policy issue of our day. Each proceeds according to the same loose formula:

First, a title which recalls the uplifting epigrams and pregnant maxims that clergymen tend to affix to their sermons: "Security Takes More Than a Blanket"; "The Best Tool You Can Give a Child Is a Shovel"; "Every Business is a Family Business."

Then, snippets from Hillary Rodham's own childhood (in a rock-ribbed and happy Illinois Republican family), or from the (far stormier) household of Bill Clinton's early days, or from her experience as a (seemingly swell) mother of one.

Next, a description of what Mrs. Clinton judges to be vital services and sound policy for children, be it day care, health care, or whatever, and a complaint about why many children do not have enough of those kinds of care today.

Finally, an explanation of how to provide what is missing through federal programs proposed by, created by, or protected (from villainous Republican assault) by the administration of William Jefferson and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

TO SEE how this works in practice, consider the chapter on health, "An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Intensive Care." Here the opening anecdote is brief, consisting of a passing reference to an Arkansas doctor who helped look after Mrs. Clinton's daughter Chelsea and "taught me many lessons," mostly about the failure of adults to supervise children's health. Then we read—observe the reasoning, and keep your eye on the dates—the following:

> The effort to immunize children against preventable childhood diseases is a good illustration.... We've come a long way toward these goals [of immunizing all children] from where we were a few years ago.... Some of this improvement may be due to the increased funding for immunizations and the outreach and education campaigns we have embarked on since my husband took office.... In 1993, as part of a larger initiative to improve immunization rates, Congress adopted the Vaccines for Children program.

As it happens, the program Mrs. Clinton heralds in this passage has been far from a success. Paul Gigot, in the *Wall Street Journal*, points out that inasmuch as vaccination rates were already near 90 percent, the program to begin with "was sold to solve a problem that didn't exist," and then it "handed federal control to an agency that had never managed anything like it before." Jeffrey Rosen in the *New Republic* describes it as a "bureaucratic nightmare" which has caused thousands upon thousands of doses of vaccine to pile up and go to waste in federal warehouses. Even Democratic Senator Dale Bumpers, from the Clintons' own state of Arkansas, says the program "will not immunize one additional kid."

Undaunted, the First Lady sees immunizations as just the start. Children also need sound nutrition. "It is critical," she declares, "that we continue government programs like WIC [supplemental nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children], food stamps, and school lunches." Children need exercise: "the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports is working hard." Above all, children need "a reformed health-care system." Her own plan for massive federal intervention may have gone down in flames in 1994, but she does not doubt that something like it will eventually come to pass.

As with health, so with education. On the one hand, Mrs. Clinton favors such uncontroversial measures as creating schools with high expectations and good discipline. She expresses a measure of support for the slightly more contested idea of allowing parents greater choice among schools—public schools, that is. (There is no mention here of Chelsea's excellent progress at one of Washington's toniest private schools.) But once again, Mrs. Clinton's chimes ring loudest on behalf of federal programs initiated in the past three years, including Goals 2000 and the so-called Improving America's Schools Act, a bill best known for expanding the reach of the Washington education bureaucracy into such matters as parent-teacher conferences and the "gender equity" of textbooks. Mrs. Clinton describes this law ingenuously—I mean, disingenuously—as providing support for "a wide range of grassroots reforms."

TUCKED AWAY in this stale pudding of big-government nostrums is, to be sure, an occasional welcome surprise. Thus, Mrs. Clinton takes a hard line on adolescent sex and parental divorce. She has a word of praise for William J. Bennett, and no word at all for Joycelyn Elders, the condom-in-every-classroom Surgeon General of the Clinton administration's first two years. Mrs. Clinton records herself as strongly in favor of religion and the value of a spiritual life for children. And (shades of her husband's 1996 State of the Union address) she stresses the important things parents can do directly for their children, like setting a good example, shielding

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them from worry, and reading to them before bedtime.

If Hillary Rodham Clinton has in fact practiced what she preaches in these particular passages of her book, I am quite prepared to believe that, whatever her failings, she is a pretty decent mother. I would not mind having her as a neighbor, and I am ready to think she might be an asset in my village. But I do not believe we ought to spend any more time in hers.

Faith & the Holocaust

Why Should Jews Survive?
by Michael Goldberg
Oxford. 191 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
Elliott Abrams

WHEN NATHAN GLAZER wrote his classic study, *American Judaism*, in 1957, he did not invoke the term "Holocaust" even once. As Glazer would later explain, the emergence of the Holocaust in American Jewish consciousness occurred years afterward. Indeed, it was one of the great surprises of the postwar era. By 1991, however, 85 percent of American Jews were reporting that the Holocaust was "very important" to their sense of being Jewish—a higher figure than those attributing a similar degree of importance to the Torah, God, or the state of Israel.

This phenomenon is the subject of Michael Goldberg's *Why Should Jews Survive?* Goldberg is a Conservative rabbi who has taught in the religion departments of the College of William and Mary and St. John's University (Minnesota), founded and briefly led a congregation in Indianapolis, and is now the spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Tikvah in Los Angeles. Here he tackles a very large subject in a very short book—far too short and far too intemperate to win the battles it undertakes.

The very first page of the book states its central argument: "word of the Holocaust absent word of God may subvert Jewish survival instead of sustain it." As Goldberg sees it, all religions have "master stories" that are "models for understanding the world and guides for acting in it." In Judaism, this master story is the Exodus: the children of Israel cried out to God from their bondage and He, remembering His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, rescued them. God is Israel's deliverer in all generations, and Israel is His chosen people.

To Goldberg, this is the lesson of the Holocaust no less than of other troubles that have befallen Jews through the ages. The Jewish people have survived every attack, from Pharaoh to Hitler, because "there is a God who sees to the survival of His people." Why does He do so? Because Jews "are the linchpin in His redemption of the world." The Jews' "true purpose" is "to serve as God's people upon whom the redemption of God's world and God's own name uniquely depends." As long as they fulfill their part of the bargain, He will always fulfill His.

But, Goldberg writes angrily, Jews are now replacing faith in God with a "Holocaust cult." The twin components of this cult are an obsession with the dead and an obsession with survival, and from the Jewish point of view each is problematical. Thus, community after community is investing in Holocaust museums and monuments, flagrantly disregarding the Jewish tradition of avoiding shrines to the dead. But much worse than this is that the Holocaust cult has defined mere physical survival as the core purpose of Jewish existence.

To Goldberg, this is first of all illogical: "That Jews will survive they need never doubt—unless they doubt that there is a God who makes and keeps His promises." In fact, he maintains, such doubts amount to a form of atheism. The emphasis on the Holocaust and on physical survival "alters Judaism's most fundamental precept" and rewrites its central prayer, the *Sh'ma*, which commands Jews to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your might." If Jews love only survival instead, then they have rejected their covenant with God, and their survival itself has been rendered pointless.

THESE ARGUMENTS deserve sober discussion—but, though Goldberg does not acknowledge the fact, he is hardly the first to advance them. As early as 1971, the Orthodox scholar Michael Wyschogrod contended that Judaism "has always centered about the saving acts of God: the election, the Exodus, the Temple, and the Messiah," and warned, like Goldberg, that "there is no salvation to be extracted from the Holocaust, no faltering Judaism can be revived by it, no new reason for the continuation of the Jewish people can be found in it." Similar sentiments have been expressed by Jacob Neusner, among others.

The main difference is that Goldberg has overlaid his arguments with self-indulgent personal and political provocations that seem aimed more at insulting a whole list of Jewish thinkers and leaders than at eliciting careful reflection. Thus, Elie Wiesel is branded the "High Priest" of the Holocaust cult, while Harold Kushner, who has written of the forces of goodness and random evil, is dismissed as a polytheist. There is a long assault on the theologian Emil Fackenheim, the author of the idea (which he formulated as a "614th Commandment") that "Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler a posthumous victory" by disappearing from history. Rabbi

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ELLIOTT ABRAMS, *a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, is writing a book about American Jews.*

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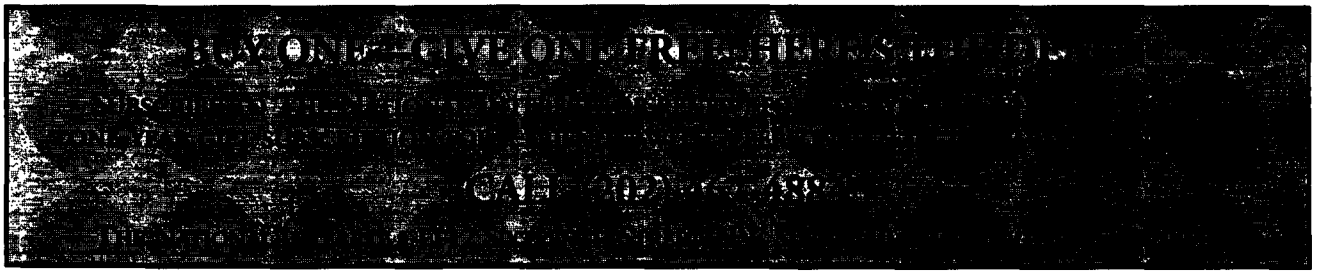

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Irving Greenberg is condemned as a "false prophet," apparently for the sin of defending the state of Israel against its critics. And so forth.

GOLDBERG'S OWN view of Israel is a choleric one, and appears to be motivated as much by naked political animus as by any conception of Judaism and its teachings. Holding the Holocaust cult responsible for the idea that the survival of the Jewish people "rests in its own hands and in its own armed hands alone," he jumps to an attack on Zionism for relying on statehood and the Israeli army for Jewish protection, when what is required is the realization that the Jewish fate "is the gift of God alone."

For Goldberg, it appears, the only good Zionist is no Zionist. Political Zionists, followers of Theodor Herzl, err by wanting Jews to lead "normal" lives and be a people like any other, which to Goldberg means to stop being Jews. But Revisionist Zionists, followers of Zev Jabotinsky, are no better: their belief that no non-Jew can be trusted to defend Jews is "racist." As for religious Zionists, they are people who "defend the use of terrorism and other acts of retribution against innocent Arabs" in order to expel them from the land of Israel.

But is not Zionism itself an inextricable part of Judaism, and does not the land of Israel occupy a central place in Jewish ritual and thought? To this, Goldberg replies that "the land's promise was not some special quality of the land itself . . . but the kind of communal life practiced in it." The test is whether Jews living in the land observe the laws of Leviticus concerning the proper treatment of the stranger. As the state of Israel, in Goldberg's view, has violated these precepts in its relations with the Palestinians, it would seem to have forfeited its right to the land.

Such anti-Israel arguments, familiar enough when voiced on the political Left and in the vocabulary of colonialism and exploitation, are remarkable (to say the least) coming from the mouth of a rabbi speaking in the name of Judaism. But in his hit-and-run manner, Goldberg does not bother to take the time and space to develop or defend them. That is typical of his procedure throughout this book, which ends up giving astonishingly short shrift even to Goldberg's core proposal for a new, "covenantal Judaism" to replace the sterilities of the Holocaust cult. Transcending the typology of Orthodox-Conservative-Reform, this idea, which he claims to have invented, appears to mean that Jews should make active rather than merely nominal commitments to their faith and their community. As formulated by Goldberg, it hardly differs from the burden of a thousand High Holy Day sermons.

Whether the recent focus on the Holocaust is healthy for America's Jewish community, and whether it contradicts or undermines fundamental Jewish beliefs, are questions of some importance that provide material for a wise and thoughtful book. This is not it.

Ideological Tourist

Amazing Grace:
The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation
by Jonathan Kozol
Crown. 286 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
Sol Stern

JONATHAN KOZOL is widely celebrated as a teller of cruel truths, a writer who—beginning with *Death at an Early Age* (1968)—has evoked the pain suffered by millions of children trapped in economically depressed communities and resource-starved ghetto schools. "For almost three decades," reports a recent and admiring profile in the *New York Times*, "Mr. Kozol has been plumbing the depths of poor inner-city neighborhoods and the children who live there."

But has he? Take his 1991 best-seller, *Savage Inequalities*, hailed as a searing indictment of the gross disparities in funding for schools in wealthy and poor communities across the country. In his introduction to that book, Kozol stated that he had spent many days sitting in classrooms in over 30 schools in six different cities. But in a review in *New York Newsday*, the education writer Sara Mosle reported that at least some of Kozol's descriptions had been lifted from local newspaper stories and then passed off as direct personal observations. Unfortunately, the revelation that *Savage Inequalities* was a thinly disguised clip job did not prevent it from being designated a finalist for the prestigious National Book Critics Circle award. Nor did it damage Kozol's reputation as a witness to injustice.

WITH *Amazing Grace*, Kozol is at it again. This work has been promoted and accepted as yet another courageous and personal journey into the lower depths, a deeply felt account of the lives—and sometimes the premature deaths—of children in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx.

To Kozol, the very existence of Mott Haven, the poorest neighborhood in New York City, is an unmitigated crime—all the greater because of its proximity to the luxury of Manhattan's Upper East Side. He describes boarding the subway right next to Bloomingdale's; six stops and twenty minutes later, he is at the Brook Avenue station in the middle of what appears to be a moonscape of

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burned-out buildings and abandoned, garbage-strewn lots. In Kozol's view, the distance is not just between one New York neighborhood and another, but between the proverbial "two nations"—one white, one black; one dominant and rich, the other subordinate and poor.

Nor is the gap between the two neighborhoods merely, for him, an accident of geography. It is, rather, a planned human disaster, and on a national scale. Through no fault of their own, America's Hispanic and black poor have been rendered economically superfluous, locked up in ghettos like Mott Haven and then demonized for their "underclass" behavior. Kozol warns direly:

> So long as the most vulnerable people in our population are consigned to places that the rest of us will always shun and flee and view with fear, I am afraid that educational denial, medical and economic devastation, and aesthetic degradation will be inevitable.

Amazing Grace makes its case with what has now become the standard Kozol recipe. It consists of dialogues with a few residents, including some articulate and charming children who describe with the requisite sense of despair what their daily lives are like. Salted into this are the most depressing statistics available on income, health, and crime in the community (culled from local newspapers by Kozol's research assistant), and ruminations about how "sinful" it is that America continues to produce places like Mott Haven.

What is wrong with the picture Kozol draws? It is certainly true that, as the individuals he quotes eloquently attest, Mott Haven has real problems—including the pervasive violence that has taken so many of their friends, the out-of-control epidemics of drug addiction and AIDS, the public schools that fail to educate their children. But Kozol is intent on persuading us that the entire community has broken down, and that only a radical transformation of the larger society can lead to improvement on the local level. In pursuit of that overarching purpose, there is a great deal about Mott Haven that Kozol is willing to distort, to exaggerate, or, if necessary, to keep hidden from the reader's view.

Consider, for example, Mott Haven's violent-crime rate. Surely residents of this neighborhood bear no burden greater than the inability to walk safely in their own streets. For Kozol, however, Mott Haven is not only the most dangerous neighborhood in the city, it is the deadliest place in the United States. To support this extraordinary assertion, he cites a figure of 84 homicides in one year

This is indeed a high number; but it is the number for 1991, when Kozol was not in Mott Haven. By 1994, just after he had begun working on this book, the number of homicides in the district had fallen to 40—a reduction of over 50 percent—thanks in part to the citywide revolution in law-enforcement practices introduced by the Giuliani administration. To anyone actually living in the neighborhood, this was the biggest and most welcome piece of news that year. But so heavily is Kozol invested in the notion of Mott Haven's incurable pathology that he seems not to have noticed the change (or to have wished to inform his readers of it).

The discussion of Mott Haven's schools is no less deceptive. The local high school, Morris, is (Kozol writes) "one of the most beleaguered, segregated, and decrepit secondary schools in the United States," a place where "barrels [are] filling up with rain," where "green-fungus molds" grow in the guidance-counselor's office and girls are unable to use the toilets. But during his research for *Amazing Grace*, Kozol, according to the school's assistant principal, never visited Morris. The graphic description he proffers is drawn from a visit five years earlier for *Savage Inequalities*. There, he asserted it would take $50 million to restore Morris, and implied that the "system" would never spend such a sum to repair a ghetto school. In fact, however, the city did spend almost exactly that amount during a four-year major reconstruction. By the time Kozol was working on his new book, Morris occupied a sparkling new building.

Yet—contrary to everything Kozol has written about schools and how to improve them—more money does not necessarily mean educational progress, at Morris or anywhere else. Despite the spruced-up building, only a handful of Morris's 1,800 students receive the high-standards Regents diploma each year, and most still drop out before graduating. Indeed, Morris, like almost all the public schools in Mott Haven, is failing despite an annual $8,000 per-pupil expenditure, more than is spent by school districts in all but a few states in the country.

Kozol did visit another public school in the neighborhood, this one an elementary school, and here too he would have us believe it is performing miserably because of segregation, the crushing poverty of the children, and general neglect by city authorities. What he does not tell us is that there are five Catholic schools in Mott Haven which are no less "segregated" and which draw their students from the same poor families. Somehow the children in those schools are learning how to read and write, and are passing standardized tests at a significantly higher rate than are public-school children. All this is being accomplished, moreover, at one-third the per-pupil amount expended by the

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public schools. But to have paid a visit to successful Catholic schools in Mott Haven, or even to acknowledge their existence, would evidently have raised questions too awkward to handle for a writer who has made his reputation on the idea that public schools in the inner city are failing solely because they are segregated and underfunded.

Similarly misleading is the tour we are offered in *Amazing Grace* of public housing. Kozol rails against the terrible conditions of the projects in Mott Haven, calling them worse than anything he has seen in the poorest areas of rural Mississippi. But completely absent from his exhibit are more than 1,000 new owner-occupied homes that have been constructed during the past few years by ACORN and South Bronx Churches, two community-based organizations—without the aid of the government. About half these homes have been made available to local families with annual incomes as low as $20,000. Apparently Kozol did not visit the new developments or talk to any of the people involved.

DESPITE THE missing stops on his itinerary, Kozol has worked overtime to convince the book-buying public that in preparing *Amazing Grace* he became far more deeply engaged with a poor community, and took greater personal risk in doing so, than ever before in his career. In a blizzard of pre-publication publicity, he lunched with journalists at fancy Manhattan restaurants, complaining on at least one such occasion that the opulent surroundings spoiled his appetite and that he would rather be back at his favorite lunch counter in Mott Haven. That, indeed, is where he went with the reporter from the *New York Times* cited at the beginning of this review. His interviewer came away believing, and writing, that Kozol had "spent the better part of the last two years [in Mott Haven] while researching and writing *Amazing Grace*," and in the process had "lost 30 pounds and had begun suffering from asthma, like so many people who live there."

This image of the writer subjecting himself to physical hardship for the sake of truth, like Emile Zola among the coal miners of northern France, is the stuff of real drama. Unfortunately, it is not altogether clear that Kozol spent even a single night in Mott Haven. There is no reference in the book either to his renting an apartment in the community or to his staying at the homes of any of the residents he befriended. On the contrary, Kozol describes leaving the neighborhood several times by subway or car at the end of the day—on at least one occasion to return to his hotel on the Upper East Side (not far, evidently, from Bloomingdale's). In one key passage in *Amazing Grace*, recapitulating a long conversation with a mother on welfare, Kozol indicates that he was speaking by telephone from his house outside Boston. His publisher has declined to respond to my repeated requests for further information on this score.

THERE IS, without question, much despair in Mott Haven. But there is real struggle and ferment as well. Countless people, unable to wait for the great revolution on which Kozol pins his hopes, are trying to revive their community. They may argue among themselves about what works best, but, often without relying on government programs and handouts, they have striven for and sometimes succeeded in creating better schools, building new housing, and organizing block associations to fight crime. Instead of trying to learn something from these residents of Mott Haven, Kozol, an ideological tourist, has rendered them and their small victories invisible, and thereby betrayed the very people he claims to champion. Pity those upon whom his pity falls next.

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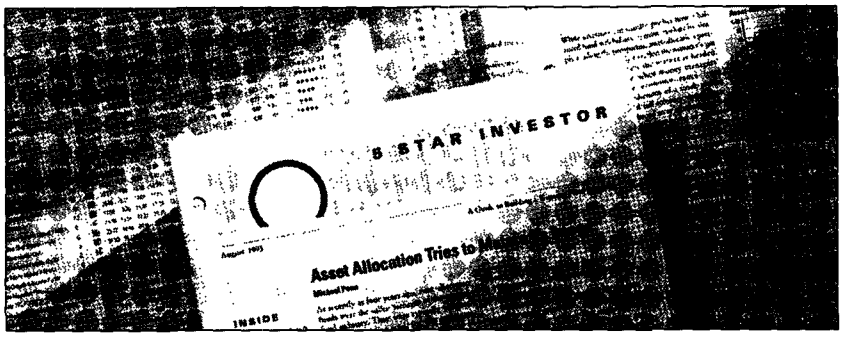

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